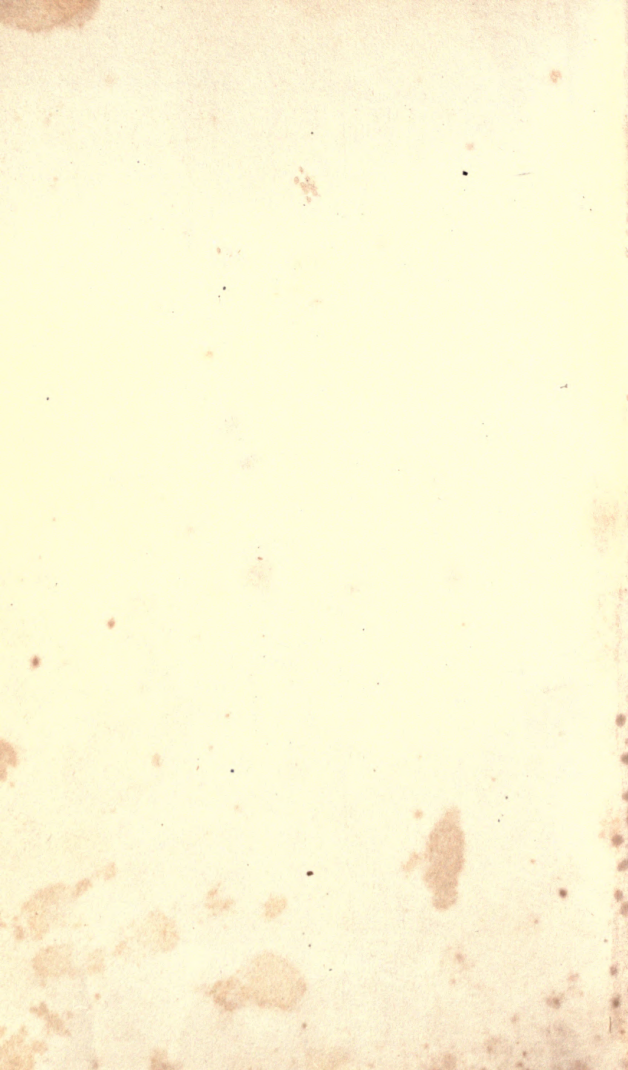


Carrie F. Harrison



STEPHEN DANE.

BY

AMANDA M. DOUGLAS,

AUTHOR OF "IN TRUST," ETC.

*Of the building of life God is the architect, and man the contractor.
God has one plan, and man another: is it strange there are clashings
and collisions?*

H. W. BEECHER.

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DEDICATED
TO
LOUISE CHANDLER MOULTON,

WITH THE BEST A FRIEND CAN GIVE,—LOVE.

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STEPHEN DANE.

I.

COMING TO LIFE.

THIS day, towards the close of March, was warm enough for May — one of those still, balmy, suggestive days, reminding you of Indian summer, for the March crispness was not in the air. For nearly a fortnight the weather had been unusually mild, and everybody was predicting a forward spring. Seasons were earlier in this little Pennsylvania town, where the high hills to the north shielded it in some measure from the fierce blasts. Already the young grass had taken on an emerald tint, and birds were twittering in the budding trees. Some of the hardier flowers had appeared. Joe had a saucer of trailing arbutus on the window-ledge. She had been down to the woods that morning, though she scarcely cared for the flowers on their own merit; but she knew Stephen liked them. So here they were, crocuses, blue hepatica, the arbutus,

and some curious green waxen leaves. Stephen had taken them all apart, and arranged them over — tastefully you would have said, and marvelled at it, seeing the man. She had remarked it, and wished, in her dull way, that she knew how people gave those wonderful touches of grace to everything. There was a smouldering pain in her heart as she glanced at Stephen. Was it these bright days that drifted them apart? For somehow he seemed slipping out of her reach, and, with the dogged tenacity of a narrow mind, she clung to him. She had taken a tiresome ramble through the woods, going ankle deep in the rank mosses without ever seeing their beauty, and brought home the flowers for him. They were a pleasant surprise, although rudely tumbled into an old broken bowl. A bright light had come into his face, and he had said, "How good of you;" but the shady, far-off look in his eyes had never changed. He wanted something higher and keener than she could bestow. She felt this through the sluggish brain, but she lacked mental force to put it into words. There was a torpid sort of perception, but physical sensations were the strongest elements in her nature. A half-developed kind of human life it was.

Stephen Dane stood there in the doorway. That was low and narrow; he was tall and brawny, though thin, lacking the roundness and compactness the next decade would bring him, for he was but twenty-three; still, he nearly filled the space.

His eyes were wandering riverward. Did you ever experience the curious sensation on looking over a river, that some help would come from the other side, an indistinct, but longed-for blessing? That peaceful country, lying in the purple haze of distance, seems like a nearer heaven, instinct with spiritual life.

He was glancing over there now, and in a vague way felt this. He did not know what it was he wanted, only the luminous atmosphere floating there on the silver stream, or drifting beyond, up the shadowy slopes, stirred his soul with something intangible, perplexing. For twenty-three years he had vegetated in content. Slept, eaten, worked—that was all. Not loved nor hated, nor struggled, nor hoped. I am not sure but men live these lives oftener than women.

The picture before him was beautiful enough to speak to any soul that had not been born deaf and blind. Few are, I think. They lived on the outskirts of the town—Archibald Dane, Stephen, his son, and an orphan niece, his dead brother's child. This had been their home ever since Stephen could remember. At first Joe's mother was alive, but his own, dead. For several years Joe had been sole housekeeper.

From the house down to the river there was a gradual slant, broken by little hillocks, tame enough, without jut or spur, and an occasional rambling gray rock. Interspersed were knolls of shrubbery, clumps

of elder or hazel, with here and there some oaks, rising in majestic grandeur. When the blooming summer crowned it, when the wind wound its way in billowy furrows through the grass, making an emerald sea with frosted tips to the waves, you might study it for hours. Through vistas of twilight green the murmurous river sparkled. In this opening you caught a glimpse of the misty hills beyond, rounded into a picture by softest tinting. In some places there was an abrupt earnestness, and the top became a golden-spired cathedral. Even now long, arrowy rays gleamed from them to penetrate the sloping sides. The river was broad and placid. Miles below, it was dammed up, and used for manufacturing purposes; but here no one interfered with it. Just as God made it, here it lay, going along in a quiet, sleepy fashion. That was all it had to do in fair weather. But God sent it storms, sometimes, when it grew strong and turbulent, rushed madly into little coves and nooks, lashed the rocks at its edge, or beat against the bare roots of the trees as if it meant to sweep them away. But to-day it was calm, with a tender haze upon its bosom that reminded you of a bride's tremulous veil. Patches of moss and lichens at its edge looked like velvet. Even the brown, leafless trees were glorified.

What meaning had it for Stephen Dane? Did his thirsty soul go down to bathe, and find there the fabled fountain of new life, the magical draught more potent

than Circean cup? Did the soft gray clouds, drifting about the sky, sending shadows upon its surface, speak of the doubts and fears that beset one continually, and yet are cleared up by the sun, eternal in the heavens?

He was groping about blindly. For all the radiance of the sun he could not see. The eyes of the soul are so faint and uncertain at first. But he wanted something that was in the river, in the hills beyond, in the spring-tide sky. Out of the darkness of the past he called; out of deeps, stagnant with the rank vegetation of evil. For weeds always thrive. No place so dark or noisome but some foul thing will make it a home. And feeling this, knowing himself to be weak and vile, and miserable within, he cried to be lifted out of it all. May be the first time he had ever prayed in all his life.

What did he want to do?

He could not tell. Everything was so vague, so unformed within him. It was chaos, with a shadow moving upon the waters. It seems an easy thing to say to a blind, groping soul, "Let there be light;" but we are none of us Gods. And just then there was no one to say it to Stephen Dane.

So he looked with hungry, longing, unreasoning eyes. They were touching eyes, too. Large, and of that soft, appealing brown, you sometimes see in a dog who questions you minutely. A shadow in them, as if he had never lived in the light.

The face was—indifferent. You see hundreds of

such faces among the working poor. If you are careless, you pronounce them stolid, and pass them by. Looking underneath, you may see a fine possibility in that starved and stunted development, a soul that could have grown to grander heights, but in some way missed its proper aliment. The brow was not very high, but broad, with rugged corners and great width of temple. It was overhung by shaggy chestnut curls, that seemed never to have been combed out thoroughly. The cheek bones were high, the nose straight and strong, with a good deal of character in it. The chin was resolute and well pronounced, giving a squareness and power to the face. The lips had a heavy, careless expression, as if they dropped together, rather than shut with any firm purpose.

The dress was indifferent, too. Thick gray trousers, fastened with a leathern belt in place of suspenders, and a blue flannel shirt. The old sou'wester, as he called his short, heavy jacket, was discarded to-day.

After he had looked over the river, and entreated hill and sky in vain, he turned his glance in-doors. The house was old, built on a rocky slope, low, moss-grown, and crumbling into decay. Two or three large, flat stones lay before the door, which went in even with the ground. The room had a dingy look, with its ceiling of smoke-stained rafters. There was a fire in the wide fireplace, the ends of the logs resting upon bricks. One window and the door on one side, two

windows on the other. A shambling, rickety wooden settle, some Windsor chairs, a high cupboard, and a little candle-stand painted green, comprised the furniture. A large table stood in the middle of the floor, with the remnants of dinner, and piled-up dishes. Joe, squatted on the hearth, her dress tucked round her ankles, was taking some pork and potatoes out of the large iron dinner kettle, that had been left in to keep hot, and not needed. On the settle lay Archy Dane, drowsing into his afternoon nap.

He was a thin, stoop-shouldered, weazen-faced man, with watery eyes, a red nose, straggling gray whiskers, and straggling gray hair. He, too, ate and slept, but, instead of working, spent much of his time at the tavern, in a maudlin state. He had been a drinking man always. That accounted for the thriftless-looking place. Perhaps, too, it accounted for Stephen Dane's stunted soul.

He, the young man, took in this untidy picture. He had seen it hundreds of times before, but never with this sickening sensation. For out of doors all nature was clean and pure, teeming with new life. But this darkness and vileness within!

In his slow-thinking manner he had fancied it would go on thus always. He would marry Joe in the course of time, though he had never said anything to her about it; never made love to her, as the phrase goes; rarely kissed her. It would come about some way.

And they would rear children to work and vegetate. He would drop into a bent old man, wrinkled and gray, go down to the tavern to hear the news, smoke a stumpy pipe, and at last die like a brute.

Would he?

He smote the door-post angrily with his fist. A great, powerful fist it was. You would not care to get a blow from it.

"What's the matter, Stephen?"

Joe sprang up in affright.

"Nothing!"

His voice was deep and full of sullen passionateness.

She lifted the dish to the table. She came and looked curiously at him.

"Tend to your work," he exclaimed, roughly.

Then he turned to the river again.

He rarely went to church. Now and then to a Methodist revival meeting, to have some fun. But to-day he *felt* there was a God. In a dumb, indignant way, he wondered what gratification it was for a greater and wiser Power to see men grovelling along, a little, and only a very little, removed from the beasts of the field. Somehow it didn't seem quite fair to give a man a soul, and place him where he could never use it. He ground his teeth with a wronged, bitter feeling.

"Why, there's the bell, Stephen! Ain't you goin' to work?" and Joe wondered in her mind what possessed him.

He took down his old slouch hat and marched off without a word. Out into the bright, free air. It was a good mile to the Foundry. In old times the men didn't mind being late, but under the new *régime* — well, who cared? Let it come. That man didn't own soul and body. So he sauntered along, the resentment against a huge wrong, that he did not understand, working out at every pore. If all his worldly good for years to come had depended upon his haste now, he would not have quickened one step. The man was in a sullen, reckless mood.

But the glory of the day was gone. Purple hills and silver river no longer lulled him into dreamy languor. Something harder and sharper took possession of him. A great hungry life confronted him — a life potatoes and bread could not satisfy. A furious instinct within goaded him on to a desperate move. He was tired of being a clod. He had a soul, and wanted to use it. Then a sardonic smile crossed his face — did he have a soul?

Turning out of the lane, the street was long and wide, the gradual descent adding to the perspective. He saw the low, rambling place, with its tall black chimneys, where the dense smoke curled up against the azure sky, as if man wanted to shut out God's bright, beautiful world. It was hateful in his sight. And, drawing nearer, a smothering, strangling breath thickened the air. Then the clang, the jar, the roaring

of fires, the whirring of machinery, the stroke of the heavy hammers smote upon his ear. Bars and piles of iron lay strewn around just where they had been thrown from the great wagons, waiting for the fierce flames to reduce and ripen them into available stock. A savage kind of discipline, and yet it brought this crude stuff into a state of civilization and usefulness. What if human souls, with iron in them, underwent some such process before they could give out the true steely ring!

A man stood at the wide gateway as Stephen Dane entered. That gate was a modern innovation, and hated of the workmen. And this man —

He was about forty; barely average height, but with a compactness of frame, a vigor of limb and muscle, that spoke of hardy sinews and great strength. The feet and hands were large, the latter ridgy with dull blue veins. The face corresponded with the figure — square, hard, coarse. A heavy under jaw, projecting forehead, with thick, beetling brows, and deep-set, keen gray eyes. The nose was short, with distended nostrils; the mouth wide, but with thin, nervous lips. It was not self-indulgent nor sensual, yet supremely selfish. You knew the man would have his own, if he wrung out the last drop of one's heart's blood. But he was an honest man, so far as the world goes. When he made a bargain or a contract, he kept his part scrupulously. Why, there were men in the neighboring cities who would back his simple word against

any other man's bond. His integrity had never been questioned. But there are some Utopian people who must needs have a higher law, an integrity of the heart.

This face of power, will, and mastery turned full upon Stephen Dane; and he, having no weapons to meet it with, writhed angrily under it.

"Late!" the master said, laconically, taking out a book and pencil. "Second offence, Dane."

Ten minutes ago Stephen Dane thought he had courage enough to beard this lion — was almost longing for a chance to fling out some of the bitter words gnawing at his heart. Now that the time had come, he was speechless. It was a hard matter to answer this man.

"You know what I told the workmen, Dane. I'm bound to break up this lazy, lounging practice, if I send every hand away and shut up the Foundry."

Then he no longer held him captive with his keen, resolute eye. Stephen Dane shuffled away uneasily, angry at himself for his cowardice.

Through the large yard, into one of those smoke-blackened buildings. It came into his mind, just then, something about going down into the mouth of hell. It looked like it. These great furnaces full of molten metal, glaring in its vivid glow of a hue more intense than scarlet. Great cranes, loaded with their heavy chains, waiting to lift the steaming mass, and pour

it, a scorching river, into these giant moulds. And here, where it lay in its dusky bed, taking on the impress of a new form, a dense smoke arose, giving the faces of the workmen a weird, spectral air. Fierce eyes glared out; brawny arms reached hither and thither; gaunt, half-nude figures flitted about like the shadows of the lost souls in Doré's powerful illustrations of Dante. Voices sounded ghostly and terrible amid this din, and a laugh broke into short echoes, as if it might well be the scornful jeer of some doomed spirit.

It must be confessed there was a better and brisker air about the place under the new reign. Before, it had been falling into a process of slow decay. Superintendents were inefficient, workmen idle; old Mr. Ellicott easy and powerless; Mr. Reardon confined to a sick bed in a distant city, grumbling about the small profits, and threatening to close the concern. Insubordination and thriftlessness supreme rulers.

Mr. Reardon died: Mr. Thomas Vennard, one of his creditors, came down to Tregony to look at the Foundry. He had a quick eye and calculating brain. It was a kind of business he understood; and he decided the thing could be worked up handsomely. The place was inventoried, and Reardon's share sold at auction, Mr. Vennard becoming purchaser. He would fain have ousted Ellicott; but the old man had an odd persistency of affection for an establishment that had been handed

down from generation to generation. Mr. Vennard's shrewd eyes discovered another way in which to gain his point. There was no Ellicott son now to follow in his father's steps. Only a daughter of three and twenty, an insipid-flavored young woman, with flaxen hair and pale blue eyes. Some people thought her handsome; indeed, she had been quite a belle one winter in Philadelphia. She was soft, plastic, ready to take the impress of any strong hand that might be laid upon her. In a month Mr. Vennard had gauged every point and capability, as if she had been a steam-engine, and decided to marry her. Then the Ellicott works would be all his. He liked supreme power, and this indulgent old man's interference annoyed him. If he had been born south he would have made a "strong" master.

He was a widower, with one child, a little girl. I will confess to you that he had not been exactly happy in his first marriage. Mrs. Vennard came from the "higher law" region. She had clear eyes and an honest soul; and when she learned what manner of man she had married, her heart died within her. One night, in the darkness and silence, it floated out on the great unknown sea, alone. Angel hands took it up with reverent tenderness.

Mr. Vennard felt somehow that he had wronged this woman. They were not born for each other, though at first he had fancied her strongly. And, since she was

comfortably dead, since the sad eyes would never reproach him again with their prisoned pain, he sorrowed discreetly, and went his way breathing more freely.

He had no fear of Miss Ellicott turning angel on his hands. Give her fine dresses and elegant jewelry, — he liked them, too ; they set off a woman, — a carriage to ride in, servants to wait upon her, and she would never trouble him with any vain and useless speculations.

So he went to work in good earnest, wooing a wife and laying the foundation for a fortune. In ten years he meant to be a rich man. This was how a change had come over the Ellicott Works.

Mr. Vennard was not given to blustering. He called the men together one morning, and delivered a brief address. They had fallen into idle and vicious habits ; drank more rum than they did work ; he was not one to mince matters ; made bad iron, poor machinery, running the credit of the place down to the lowest ebb, and driving its owners to the very verge of bankruptcy. There was to be a new order of affairs instituted. Every man was expected to be on the mark when the bell rang, to do his work properly, to keep tolerably sober until hours were over. If they couldn't come under the rules, they could — go. When he paid a man for his labor, he expected him to earn the money.

No swearing with all this. Every word dropped down with a sharp, metallic click, like the closing of a

vice. The tone was deep and strong. The men winced and glowered at each other from under threatening brows, but no one spoke. Instead, a cowed, savage sullenness. They felt they had a master.

Mr. Vennard brought in new foremen after his own heart; but his keen vigilance never for an instant relaxed. There were the usual mutinous outbreaks; but every one concerned was discharged on the spot. New men came to fill their places. Being sent out of the Ellicott Works was as final as expulsion from Paradise.

You know the kind of men who always manage matters their own way. Some are born gentlemen, and do it by high intellectual force of will. Mr. Vennard was on a lower plane, but held his way as royally.

There was little love lost between him and his workmen. But love was considerably below par with him — not one of the stocks he cared to deal in. And in a town like this, where workmen marry and rear up families, they become, as it were, a part of the soil. Not always taking root through affection. A hard necessity, like an iron chain, binds them to the spot. They are often a little in debt, cannot afford to lose time, nor spare the money for a removal. So capital and brains win the day. Two or three large manufactories in a small town have it all their own way, and uneducated, thriftless labor must submit or starve; and starving is not generally a pleasant process.

So the more thoughtful and far-sighted gave in to

the Vennard reign from a sort of angry compulsion, since the lives of their wives and little ones depended on their submission.

Stephen Dane had not espoused either side very warmly. He was reticent, self-contained, or rather would be when the coming manhood had sufficient force to assert itself. He had been indifferent, for these restrictions did not touch him. He was quite too proud to defraud his employer—that rugged, ungracious sort of pride one meets with now and then. He did his work well on the same principle. All had gone rightly enough with him until within a week or so. But now he had begun a process dangerous to a weak mind, and the first step was dissatisfaction with the grovelling life he had hitherto led.

In six months Mr. Vennard could see just where he stood, and glance down a golden future. But prosperity did not mellow his heart, nor send any rich, generous juices through his frame. He seemed to contract instead. He drew the reins tighter everywhere. He was building a large house on the hill, and was also within a month of his wedding-day. It was rather too soon to begin to use capital in this fashion, and it pinched him a little. So he pinched others.

He was supreme master of the Ellicott Works. Moreover, the people in the town began to look up to him. His advice was sought on various topics, from real estate to railroad stock. Drowsy old men nodded

sagaciously, with their eyes half closed. Miss Ellicott plumed herself upon her conquest, and proudly displayed her diamond ring. The field before him looked so fair with its ripening yellow harvest !

But Stephen Dane peered into the dusky, impenetrable desert, and tortured himself with vain questionings.

II.

TANGLED PATHS.

STEPHEN DANE was in a good mood to listen to John Gilbert that night. He didn't exactly understand what Gilbert was driving at with his "right of labor." The tyranny of employers appeared more tangible. But how the reform was to be made, how workmen were to acquire shops of their own, comfortable homes, leisure for reading and recreation, an occasional journey, and some of the pleasures of life, he did not clearly see. Indeed, to tell the truth, he had been considerably muddled, whether it was owing to Gilbert's lack of clearness or his own dull brain.

Joe had playfully stretched her arms across the door to bar him in.

"I don't see what you are off for every night," she had said with girlish petulance.

"Don't you? Well, I do. It's a man's business, and women haven't the brains to understand it."

Some of the new theories. He did not know then that he had taken up the wrong end by undervaluing women.

"O, they haven't!" snapped Joe. "They've brains enough to understand when they're left at home alone night after night."

He made no reply, but turned away. Joe watched him down the lane, pouted a little, and then ran into Sally Fawcett's for a good gossip.

Stephen went to the Star. It was a rather better class tavern than the one his father frequented, but bad enough, though it boasted a reading-room. Two or three tables were on the side opposite the bar, containing a few stray newspapers, and generally occupied by a motley group, who played "Seven up" and "Euchre." Some of the more ambitious had organized a Club, and of these John Gilbert was leader.

He was a little, nervous, hungry-looking man, with restless eyes and a great sallow forehead, the sandy hair being very thin on the top, which seemed to add to its height. He had long, angular arms, bony, bloodless fingers, and was much given to gesticulating. Like many another reformer, he had a chronic quarrel with the world. He saw its faults and wrongs, and held them up to the indignation of others; but he could not seem to get hold of the great cure for these evils.

The sanded floor was ornamented with pools of tobacco juice, stumps of cigars, and charred matches. There was a vile odor in the place, liquor, smoke, and unclean men each adding their mite. Somehow, it

went against Stephen Dane, and he lingered in the doorway many moments.

"Hillo, Dane!" said a rather thick, unsteady voice. "Come in and treat, old fellow!"

"Treat yourselves;" and Dane threw some loose change towards him and the few stragglers around.

"You needn't be so huffy," was the reply, as the man scrambled on the floor for the money.

John Gilbert came up the street. He had a peculiar uneasy gait, and was continually fumbling with his hands.

"Well, Dane," was his salutation, accompanied by a brief nod, "what's the news?"

"Don't apply to me;" and Stephen gave a short, forced laugh.

"Why not? Doesn't Thomas Vennard, Esquire, keep the world going straight? If it swerved the millionth of an inch on its axis, we should hear of it. Business pretty good?"

"Good enough with him, and always will be," was the half-sullen rejoinder.

"You're right there, Dane. Vennard and that crew are always prosperous men, let the world go as it will. Now, why should they have all the good luck?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Stephen, grimly.

"They shouldn't. If God made men, which I sometimes question, he didn't mean one should be a slave to the other. And it amounts to just that, Dane. You

belong to Vennard about as much as a negro slave to his master. I'm opposed to slavery of any kind. I say one man hasn't any right to lord it over another. Don't you s'pose to-night that I have as much brains as Thomas Vennard?"

Judging from looks, allowing one's forehead was filled with brains, a great deal more, thought Stephen Dane. And yet he was not quite sure but quality, as well as quantity, had something to do with it. So he only nodded a half assent.

"Well, why am not I a rich man? If I had chosen," — and the speaker stretched up to his utmost capacity, — "*I* might have ground the flesh and blood of my fellow-creatures into gold. It's only just turning a vice little tighter every day. Some one groans, to be sure; who cares? Here comes Thomas Vennard to look at Reardon's share of the Works. Things were going to the dogs, sharp. It looked worse than it was. No one was there to bid against him, and Ellicott's an old fool. 'Now,' says my gentleman, 'you'll all have to stand round. Any man that I can't buy may go to the devil. And those I *do* buy will have a long row to hoe, I can tell you. No fooling with me.' Now, what is the result?"

Stephen Dane ground his teeth, but made no reply.

"You work twice as hard as before, and get the same pay. The profit goes into the pocket of T. Vennard. And if one man of you dares to say his soul's his own,

what then? Off he marches. What can a poor man do? Here's his family starving if he is out of work a week. I say, Capital is the greatest tyrant in the world. It fights labor down to the lowest point, and chains it there. It means to keep workmen ignorant. Education is its bitterest enemy. What chance has a man for improvement when he gets just enough to keep body and soul together? How can he study when he comes home worn out with toil? He must have some excitement, some relaxation; so he flies to the tavern. That's what the bosses like. They make a great spread, building churches and voting public schools everywhere. Who goes to 'em? Why, look at the men in this town who haven't a Sunday coat, and who are compelled to send their children to work at twelve and thirteen! That rears up just such another brutish generation. I say the whole thing is an abomination!"

The speaker brought one fist down on the palm of the other hand, and gave Dane a triumphant nod, as if he had established a great point.

"What's to be done?" asked Stephen Dane, thoughtfully. "These rich men always will keep the power."

"I say they haven't any business with so much money. Equalization of capital is my great theory. Workmen must take it into their own hands."

"But how can they?"

Dane's tone was impatient.

"They must form associations—Homes. Now, I believe these homes could be successfully carried out. Each man could put in his labor, his energy, and whatever money he might have, and share equal with his fellows. It's the only thing that ever will raise the poorer classes. No one will give them a helping hand; so they must help themselves."

"But what could they do? People *must* eat."

"Just what the workmen do at Ellicott's, or any other place. When do you suppose Vennard would make a fortune if it depended on his daily labor? And if so many men can make thousands of dollars a year for him, they could make something for themselves. Couldn't they have factories, and mills, and farms? And then this abode, which should be a *home*, would admit of the developing of each soul according to its primal bent. Each man must have the work that suits his native power. Under such a system, the talent, genius, and power would be brought out, cultivated according to the eternal truths and harmonies, and man would no longer be a brute, a mere machine, at the beck of any person who would give him barely enough to keep him from starving."

"Did you ever see one of these Homes?"

"Yes, I've seen 'em. No dirty floors and frowzy-headed women. No starved and beggarly brats. No filth and foulness. Men and women enfranchising themselves from these cursed laws of society and cus-

tom; growing into a broad, vigorous life. You can believe in a God, there. And when the day comes in which a soul will dare to be true to itself—”

“But why don’t people form them everywhere?” Somehow the idea looked so bright, and clean, and enticing to Stephen Dane.

“Why? Because the world is full of greedy, grasping men, and vain, selfish women. Because among people of means you never find a correspondingly generous soul. What is it to Vennard if men are dragged down to the very dregs of social life, stupefy themselves with bad liquor, beat their wives and children? When they reach that point of brutishness that incapacitates them from earning their wages, he gets new men, and works them down. The old ones make thieves, murderers, and paupers. He grumbles at taxes and the increase of crime; they all do; and yet they are ready enough to ship workmen off when no longer useful. Do *they* think a man has a soul, a brain, or could be anything beyond the mere machine they make him?”

All this stirred Stephen strangely. He knew so little concerning the schemes with which men have deluded themselves in their vain search for a perfect social system, that he was not capable of seeing the faults or appreciating the difficulties of these great reforms. He had a perception, vague though it was, of a better life than he was leading, and Gilbert’s

Phalansteries appeared perfection. But how to reach one.

"Could I join one of these?" he said at length.

Gilbert looked at him curiously. He stood just in range of the light from the open door. Something in the man's stalwart, rude strength touched him with a sense of incongruity. Had he any fine brain?

"Yes, you could," he answered slowly.

He was sometimes compelled to admit to himself that these experiments had been failures. He laid the blame on the people who composed them, forgetting that systems must be made for men, and that human souls, in their infinite variety, cannot all be crowded into one groove, or reach one height. They ignore the differences of temperament, they cling to the same arbitrary government they denounce so bitterly in the world. With all their experience they make too little allowance for the warps, and strains, and excrescences poor human nature suffers from, and will while the earth stands.

Two or three new-comers joined the two men. Stephen frowned and bit his lip. He wanted to hear more about these places, but he was too reserved to open his heart to a crowd.

"What's the row, Gilbert? Laying down the law again?" asked a round-faced, jolly-looking fellow.

"No row," said Gilbert, rather surlily. "Can't a man talk?"

"I do suppose he can in this free country."

"Free!" Gilbert gave a contemptuous sneer.

"Yes, free country. I ain't goin' to stand by an' see her run down. I have all I want."

"You're a lucky fellow," with another sneer. "Can't many men say that."

"Tell you what it is, Gilbert; you men, with your fine theories, are always out of sorts, and dissatisfied. Nothin' goes right."

Gilbert took up the gauntlet. He was fond of argument; he had a certain readiness of words and much superficial information. He soon distanced his adversary, and established his point, which was always the wrongs and degradation of the working classes. He had a certain show of right on his side, and a sympathy that attracted many to his way of thinking. It is so easy to make a man believe he is wronged, unjustly treated. And when he sees another accumulating wealth, the result of his labor, his heart fires up with a bitter, angry feeling.

Stephen Dane listened. As they went on, evil passions were aroused. Oaths were freely used. One and another went in for a drink, and rejoined the group with a heated brain, ripe for any monstrous belief. Inside, they were gambling in a small way, singing street songs, and using their tongues noisily, when they were not too thick for articulation.

If such men as Gilbert believed anything could be

done for the "masses," why not begin here? Heaven knows they needed it sorely. But he laid the blame off his shoulders, dropped it at another's door. Men were justified in drinking and carousing, because they had no other amusement. With low wages, homes could not be beautified, intellects cultivated, nor any of the appliances or refinements of wealth indulged in. Clearly, then, the system of labor was at fault. But did such foul, disgusting pleasures as these pay?

Stephen Dane stole away while the excited voices were at their highest. The man's impulses were clean and pure; these sights and sounds jarred roughly against his soul. If he could go to one of those Homes, if he could be educated to something, and not have to grovel all his life! For, after all, in the battle, brain won the day against brawn. Not just such a morbid, nervous, crochety brain as Gilbert's. I hardly know why Gilbert should have lost favor in his eyes that night as a prophet; but he did. Stephen had begun to believe quite strongly in him, but now he felt all adrift again. And such a wide, lonesome sea!

The young moon was walking amid the stars, shedding a calm and tender light. All was so peaceful here! How odd that Gilbert's confessed half-atheism should have made him think of God! He began to wonder at his own previous insensibility. He was not stock or stone. He could perceive this heavenly beauty, and enjoy it. He even longed for something

besides — companionship, perhaps. He had never known how solitary his existence was until now.

If he went away to lead a new life, what could he do with his father, with Joe? Not leave them behind. He had an idea that to desert them would make a bad beginning. And yet they were a drag. Joe might be raised a little, but his father —

So, in spite of the balmy evening, he came home in an irritable mood. The room was deserted. The fire on the hearth had burned to a heap of ashes. It looked gray enough in that long beam of moonlight. He stumbled up stairs without the aid of any candle, and went to bed. Generally to instant slumber, but now he tossed about restlessly. The wind brought Sally Fawcett's shrill laugh up the lane, and the echo of Joe's good night. How noisy these women were! — loud-voiced, hard, not the women of Phalansteries. Then his father came shambling along, and silence fell over the house. The voice of the distant marsh-frogs kept up a monotonous murmur, and amid this he dropped asleep.

Mr. Vennard's marriage made little difference at the Ellicott Works. True, he was away for a week. A gatekeeper marked time as rigidly. Foremen were as sharp. But one relentless eye was not there to pounce upon them in an unsuspecting moment. The men breathed a little more freely, but there were no cases of insubordination.

He brought his little daughter back with him, and father and child took up their abode at Mr. Ellicott's, until the completion of the new house. Mrs. Vennard's elegant dresses were the town talk; and Joe, like many another foolish woman, was delighted with a sight of her in the carriage, driving with the little girl.

"But such a child! There ain't nothin' to her. She looks, for all the world, like an angel. Light, yellow curls, and a face as white as a ghost. She's enough-sight more like her step-mother than her father. Wonder if she'll be good to her, Stephen?"

"Why not?" with a sort of grave, preoccupied air. Stephen no longer went to the tavern, but he was still busy pondering the problem of destiny.

"Step-mothers *ain't* always good." And Joe tossed her head with a quick jerk, as if she was enunciating a great truth.

Stephen wondered just then how much Mr. Vennard cared for his child — if indeed he could care for anything. What a life she would have! Always to be surrounded by beauty and luxury; never, perhaps, to know a want. And *his* soul must be starved in order to pamper her.

If Stephen Dane could have looked down this child's future! But not the wildest dream could have connected him with her then.

Orders poured in upon Mr. Vennard. Night and day the great engines were in motion. What did he

care if some of the poor wretches at the tavern muttered threats and imprecations? If they had chosen to obey the rules, they might have still held their places. It was not his fault.

One night they were casting. There was no moon, and the great sheet of flame from the chimney struck vividly against the deep-blue sky. Myriads of sparks rayed off like shooting stars. It was a strange, weird sight from without, but a hundred fold more intense within. And so Mrs. Vennard brought her guests down to inspect it. Few of them had witnessed the work on so grand a scale.

They looked like spirits from another world, those gayly-dressed ladies and fine gentlemen. Little shrieks and exclamations were drowned amid the unearthly din. They gathered up their dresses daintily, and kept by the open windows to avoid the smothering heat, peering now and then into these molten red streams, that seemed to crawl along the ground like fiery serpents. It formed a striking picture, with just sufficient of the weird to give it a touch of *diablerie*.

Stephen Dane was not very busy: in fact he had been promoted from the casting-shop to one of the forges; though he came down nearly every night, because he liked it, and he could think better here than in that comfortless home, with Joe's unceasing chatter. The man had begun to find much enjoyment in the use of his faculties. Convinced that he was not a mere

animal product of nature, but held, somewhere within, a sentient, spiritual vitality, he put forth some feeble efforts, like a child's walking at first; but there was something fascinating in it that lured him on.

He watched the group out beyond with a strange feeling. These young men with fair foreheads, carefully trimmed beards, well-arranged hair and dress, *were* different from him. These delicate women, with slender white hands and graceful figures, did not in the least resemble Joe. Was it the accident of birth and prosperity only, or something of a more positive and integral nature? Quite a new speculation for him. Rather annoying, too; so presently he strayed around to the other side, where their brightness and beauty no longer jarred upon him.

Some one pulled him gently, and a little, timid voice uttered, "Say!" so entreating withal that it quite surprised him. But turning, he was still more astonished.

She looked so uncanny, this little girl of seven or thereabouts, standing in the shadowy darkness, her white face, her pale hair, of a ripe wheat tint, falling about her shoulders, her large, lustrous eyes, her dimpled arms and tiny hands, all so distinctly outlined against the black background. He was confused and bewildered by the vision, and gazed at her with something more than amazement — incredulity.

Her upraised glance was so sweet and fearless!

"I wish you would hold me up and let me look into

that large — large — I don't know what you call it — full of iron."

"What, the kettle?" he said, just under his breath, hardly knowing whether he dared answer her or not.

"Yes. I want to see. Mamma and the rest looked in; but she said wait for papa to lift me. He hasn't come yet."

"You will not be afraid?"

"No." And she gave such a soft, musical laugh. "You'll hold me tight — won't you? and your arms are good and strong."

His sleeves were rolled up nearly to the shoulders. Great, strong arms they were, indeed, with swelling muscles and hard, brown skin. But he kept on glancing at her in a sort of vacant surprise.

"Well!" she remarked at length.

He stepped outside the door, and, from a niche in the passage-way, took down a coat of soft gray cloth, that one of the men had worn. He remembered noticing at noon that it had been improved by a recent washing.

"Are you going to wrap me up in that?" And she laughed again.

It sent a thrill all over him. He had never heard anything so sweet in all his life before, unless it was a brook purling over some pebbly descent.

"O, no. Only I'm all dust and grime, and should soil you. So I'll just throw this coat over my arm and shoulder."

She looked down at her pale-blue dress, with its white braided edge, and gave a little, dainty smile.

He stooped to take her, and then he paused, trembling in every nerve with some unwonted emotion. A very angel, as Joe had said.

"Are you afraid of me because my dress is so nice?"

"No, not that; and yet I *am* afraid of you."

He spoke the simple truth.

"Why?" she asked, wonderingly.

"I cannot tell you." And then, with a great effort, he took her in his arms.

"O, how tall you are!" she exclaimed, clasping her tiny hands joyously. "It's like going up to the moon. I can see over the tops of the men's heads. And how odd it all looks!"

"It's very hot there by the furnace," he said slowly.

"It won't burn me, just for a moment. I want to see, so much!"

He picked his way over the smoking moulds, holding his precious burden in the tenderest clasp. He could not think of her in connection with Sally Fawcett's dirty children, who played in the lane—the only children he had hitherto been brought much in contact with.

She drew her breath in a quick, excited manner as they approached the seething mass. The men were dipping it out with huge, long-handled ladles, and paused for a moment to stare at her. A strange vision was that lovely, childish face amid the rough, stalwart forms.

She turned suddenly, and clasped her arms around Stephen Dane's neck. The soft, pinky flesh touched his lip and cheek in passing. She caught at a long, convulsive sigh, and he felt how every pulse quivered as he turned away.

"Were you frightened?" he asked, when they had regained the doorway.

"Not quite. Only I thought, if anybody ever let a little girl fall in —"

Both shivered; she with her arms still around his neck — soft, white arms, stirring all his manhood's blood.

"What made you think of anything so terrible? It could never, never happen."

He drew her closer.

"Mamma said Mr. Lawton might let me fall. But you are stronger."

He rejoiced in his strength at that moment; but he said, with a rather grim smile, —

"I am not one of your fine gentlemen."

"I don't like Mr. Lawton," was her comment.

She would like him by and by, when the years taught her the difference. And then Stephen Dane sighed.

"Have you any little girls at home?" she asked, presently.

"No."

"What makes you look so sorry?"

She was peering into his eyes with her lustrous orbs swimming in lakes of liquid light.

"Did I look sorry?"

"Don't you like little girls?" She was following her own train of thought, and hardly noticed his question.

"I like *you*." There was a strange, half-suppressed passion in his voice.

"May I come down here sometimes? Papa thinks me a bother. It's so lonesome at — at home!" There was a little break in her voice. "I haven't any one to play with, you know. And at Philadelphia there was Addie and Jane. It was so nice! What's your name?" with a sudden impulse.

"Stephen Dane."

"Did you come from Denmark?"

"No;" and he laughed. "Why?"

"The Danes do. I learned it in my Geography. I went to school when I lived with aunt Mary. I am going again some day. I like it."

"What is your name?" he asked.

"O, don't you know? Hope Vennard."

"Hope." He repeated it musingly, tenderly.

"Do you think it is pretty?" she queried with a little timid flutter in her voice.

"Yes. — Hope. Something to comfort one in waiting. An anchor sure and steadfast, if one only has something to hope for."

"Now you are sorry again," she said. "I see it in your eyes."

So quick to perceive ! He started. Who ever before had discovered any sorrow in his eyes ? And there was always a deep, underlying pain in his heart. Even this unreasoning sympathy was sweet.

She bent suddenly and kissed him. Mr. Lawton teased a long while for these kisses, and her new mother apologized for her being such a "queer child." If either of them had seen this !

Stephen Dane stood transfixed.

"I'm glad you let me look in that dreadful place, and held me so tight. Now put me down, please ; I must find mamma."

He led her by the hand around outside the noisy room. When they saw the fluttering dresses, he let her go alone, but stood still to watch her.

"Why, Hope, where have you been ? I thought your father had you. What a naughty little runaway !"

The voice was not cross, certainly ; but it had a strand of pettishness. And Stephen, remembering Joe's words, wondered if Mrs. Vennard would be kind and tender with her. If not — He ground his teeth at the very thought. He could fight to the bitterest death for this little girl. All his chivalrous feelings were aroused, and under the dust and rubbish of this coarse

life there was some pure ore. She had kissed him, too. An innocent child's kiss — a sort of angel's benison. If one day he could stand on a par with Hope Vennard! In ten years she would be seventeen — a woman. And what of him?

III.

FIGHTING WITH FATE.

JOE, sewing some tawdry finery by the flaring light of a tallow candle, struck hard and sharp against his vision of Hope Vennard. The low line of forehead, and untidy, tumbled black hair, with a stray end always falling from the comb; the sun-browned complexion; the sort of purely animal life in every feature; the ill-fitting dress, and great red bow at the throat, much soiled and pinned awry, — how different from the women down yonder! He liked the taste and the refinement best. If Joe could only understand!

She was arranging some faded flowers on a bonnet. He glanced at those in the window.

"Don't do it, Joe," he said, presently. "I'll get you a new one. White straw, with nice crisp buds, and leaves, and clean strings."

"Will you?" and Joe looked up delighted.

"And if you'd wear flowers at your throat, Joe."

"I can't, Stephen. They allers fall apart, and wilt, and straggle down. I like 'em best in a saucer."

"*Always*, Joe."

"Always what?" and the girl's expression was one of dull amaze.

"Don't mangle your words — that's all."

Joe pouted a little. "You're gettin' mighty pertic'lar, Stephen."

"There's no law against g's. And, Joe, if we were more careful! We have fallen into such a slipshod habit of talking! Why can we not make our lives and manners a little better?"

Joe considered a moment whether to be pleased or angry. She did not like to have her ways questioned or criticised. But then it was pleasant to know Stephen took an interest in her. He had been so reserved, so almost cross, of late. She said, unthinkingly, —

"You do care about me, Stephen?"

"Yes; I should be a brute if I didn't."

His heart was tender to-night. But when he saw her evident pleasure, and the straggling flush that crept up in the dark cheeks, conscience pricked him a little. The old childish talk of husband and wife rushed over him. Many years ago, to be sure; but he remembered, and Joe, with a woman's tenacious memory, was not likely to forget. Was she dreaming of any such thing? For it could never be.

So he sauntered out on the door-step, and gazed at the glittering stars. Up above there, so peaceful. Nothing to do but swing forever, amid seas of blue and fleecy white. Was it so very much better to be a man?

Joe put away her work, and came up to him softly, passed her arm over his shoulder, and, bringing herself face to face, kissed him. Following out his first impulse, he pushed her from him — not roughly, and yet it was a repulse.

"I'm sure I don't know what to make of you, Stephen," she said, half crying. "You're so changed along o' goin' to the tavern and seein' that John Gilbert. O my! I forgot all about them g's. I can't be a lady, — it wasn't born in me, — and that's why you look down on me — despise me!"

"No. Heaven knows I don't despise you, Joe. And I'd like to bring you up out of this swamp of vileness and darkness that we've ploughed along in all our lives. I loathe the very sight of it. *I am* changed. Maybe John Gilbert's had a hand in it, maybe not. I did take his rigmarole for gospel truth first; but if it's so grand and fine, why doesn't he make his own life better? Why doesn't he go somewhere, if there is any such place, and be free and happy, following out the laws of truth and harmony? What's the theory worth if there's to be no practice? Better let men go on eating and drinking, and grovelling like brutes, than stir them up to fierce tumults, and leave them there, chafing like angry tigers. So I'm about done with the nonsense. But there *is* something, Joe. Call it God, or Fate, or the Devil. And I shall never rest until I have a good hand-to-hand fight."

"I wish you'd go to church, Stephen," Joe said. "Ministers know better than other folks."

"Do they? I'm not so sure of that. They preach about content, and patience, and resignation; but when a man begins to learn his own strength, when he feels his own wants and needs, what good will a crust of bread do? Can you feed a starving soul on it? There's an ache and an agony way down deep; there's a capacity for something that struggles in bonds, and *will* be free; and, when a man comes to this, he must fight it out. So, if I'm cross to you, Joe, blame it to the devil, that possesses me!"

His tone was deep and passionate, and Joe stared in affright. He *was* beyond her reach. His head was full of these new-fangled notions. Her narrow mind, bounded only by yesterday and to-morrow, could not comprehend the mighty conflict the man was going through. A little fondling and foolish caresses would have been more to her than his victory or defeat. And because she could not argue, she relapsed into sullenness—the unfailing refuge of weak natures. Sally Fawcett, fat and rosy at forty, with her six unruly children, and Jake, "who never gave her a word when he was in liquor," was as high a type of happiness as Joe aspired to. For Jake was fond of his wife, a good-natured, rollicking fellow, who joked with every one. Don't blame Joe too severely. Her soul, restricted by its own nature and stunted experience, had only the

wants its limited range allowed. Her fancies were neither broad nor varied. Yet she could have enjoyed happiness keenly if it had come to her. O, let us hope that God has some great joy in store for all the poor souls who have missed it here !

So Joe crept away to bed and cried a little. And Stephen stood under the silent stars, thinking, revolving the tangled web that appeared to grow more intricate at every turn.

The socialistic theories of Gilbert had not gained much ground with him. He was too clear-eyed. Men blinded by some passion or interest are more likely to take them up. Perhaps, too, he was gradually finding his way into the niche he fitted. Since his permanent change to the forge he had been happier. His mind seemed to assimilate with these mighty engines that grew beneath ponderous hammers and blazing fires. It was almost like creating a sentient being, when you put these rods, and pistons, and valves together, and inflated a steam chest from the huge boiler. That gave it life. Then it flew up and down, wheels revolved ; the force of a giant was in it. And Stephen smiled, seeing this. The Phalanstery, with its special affinities, its harmonies of beauty and nature, faded from his brain. His work was here. Men had spent their whole lives studying some trick of a machine or engine. And when Adams, the foreman of this department, said, one day, —

“Dane, you have the head and the eye for an in-

ventor. Some time I expect we shall hear from you. You see more in these things than a bit of hot or cold iron." A flush overspread Stephen Dane's swarthy face.

So much was needed. How was he ever to accomplish it? Education first. And then he realized how ignorant he was.

I think Adams understood the hunger of his soul. Occasionally they walked up the street together, talking. And presently books were lent, a sort of freemasonry among certain men. Vennard, seeing the intimacy with his lynx-eye, took the foreman to task.

"It won't do, Adams. I've seen it tried. These men must be made to know their places, and kept in them. Their business is to work. The less book-knowledge and science such folks have, the better for them. They get above their station. Many a poor wretch has ruined himself by thinking he had genius enough for some invention, when he might have lived a contented and comfortable life. Plenty of work and steady wages are all they need. I have them in pretty good order now, and they shall not be tampered with."

Adams gave in, and was a little more cautious. He was no coward, but he knew he could not serve Dane by braving Mr. Vennard, and the man interested him singularly.

June made Tregony a garden of fragrance and beauty. Roses everywhere. New life in tree and shrub, bird and bee. Wayside paths starred with daisies and but-

tercups; cool nooks entangled with clustering foliage and carpeted with rank mosses. The river with its murmurous rustle, the sky with its fleecy drifts — everywhere a profusion of summer richness and warmth. Stephen Dane felt it as he never had before. Emerging from the shadow of a gross, material life, he drank in these varied sensations with an almost childish delight. It was a new growing up to manhood.

Now and then he caught a glimpse of Hope Vennard. The child looked bright and happy. Once she had nodded to him in her free, eager way, and been checked by her elegant mamma. He saw that, and bit his lip. And once she had been in the foundery.

They had been trying some experiments with an engine. An improvement had been attempted in the saving of steam, and several scientific men had come down from the city to witness the trial. All the morning they had been deeply engrossed with it; but after a good dinner and rich wines they felt less energetic. So they had invited the ladies over, for Mrs. Vennard nearly always had a friend or two staying with her. Hope accompanied them.

Stephen always remembered her as she looked on this day. Dressed purely in white, her curls fluttering like a changeful sea. So winsome, so radiant. And while the others talked, she stole to the open door through which she had caught a glimpse of Stephen.

"May I come in?"

Stephen stood by a vice, filing some article that required careful manipulations.

"Yes," he answered, with a smile.

She came and stood by him, plied him with a child's numerous and inconsequent questions, all of which he was delighted to answer, watching the lids droop over the eyes, the color come and go in her sweet face, and the curves of the small, scarlet mouth like a cleft strawberry, and as rich in fragrance. Could any thing so lovely belong to Thomas Vennard? He was thinking of this when a harsh voice made them both start as if guilty of some sin.

"Hope!"

The child's face turned a little pale. Vennard was a tyrant by nature. Even here he could not forego his authority, always dear to him.

"Dane, haven't you any more sense than to let a child bother round in that fashion? Hope, go to your mother."

"She did not interrupt me," said Dane, in a sort of defiant apology.

"Don't tell me! A man's mind isn't on his work when he's fooling with anything. You've filed that too far."

"It's just right." And Dane fitted it to the cog. He would have been more than human not to enjoy his triumph.

Mr. Vennard was angry, and for once helpless, as

he could not think of a fitting retort. So he turned on his heel with a threatening frown.

Adams came to Stephen's side, after they were all gone.

"Vennard is bitterly disappointed at his non-success," he said, in a low tone. "I didn't know he counted so much on it. He wouldn't let any one put in a word, for he meant to claim the improvement."

"What was wrong?"

"There was just no advantage at all. What he saved in steam he lost in revolutions. Misplaced economy, which will not do for a steam-engine. You can starve a man better, eh, Dane?"

"For a while, at least," returned Dane, grimly.

"Vennard is making haste to be rich. If I had his chance, I'd take matters comfortably. He will have all old Ellicott's money. What a fairy of a child that is! She came in here?"

"Yes." Laconically. He did not want to hear any talk about Hope Vennard.

"I think that can be done;" and Adams nodded his head towards the next room. "Will you look at it after six? Why, it would make a man's fortune!"

"Yes," Dane said, the words ringing through his ears. Not that he would ever make a fortune. But if he had a little money to start with, — he and Adams, for instance, — time to study and try experiments — No, it could never be done; and he sighed.

The worst of life is to feel one's self wasted. And this sensation was growing up in Stephen Dane. Why didn't he have the chance other young men passed by with such indifference? A subtle flame was creeping through his brain, smouldering almost for want of proper nourishment, yet now and then bursting out into a fierce ray; every time gaining a little, to be sure, but seeing no real escape. Ground down with poverty, ignorance, and—yes, a sort of *caste*. Adams might see something worthier in him; but then the man was almost as poor as himself, saving a little money, and trying experiments that failed continually. If Mr. Vennard would take one in hand; and a cynical sneer—for it was too bitter for a smile—crossed Dane's face. Mr. Vennard believed common workmen had no business with ideas. Rude, brutish strength was all they needed.

They did not dare linger very long over the engine. Neither would have confessed it, but both knew this sort of fraternizing did not meet Mr. Vennard's approval. And every one had a fear of him, even if it was but half admitted in some secret corner of the brain.

"Will Vennard try again, think?" Dane asked.

"O, you may be sure of that, if some one doesn't come out first with an improvement. Dane," sharply, "if you have any revelations on the subject, sell 'em at a high figure. Don't let 'em be stolen. That thing is done too often."

Neither of them had any ideas just then. They examined the steam-chest, the valves, the cut-off, — and looking at each other with perplexed eyes, said, as many another had, —

“If it could be done!”

Stephen Dane made a sort of dogged mental vow that life should not all be wasted over yonder, at the forge.

He passed out first. Adams paused to talk with the gate-keeper. But Dane's steps were arrested, ere he had gone thirty yards, by a group of men.

“I say it's a cursed shame!” and the speaker, purple with anger, was gesticulating savagely. “If Vennard stays here, Tregony 'll be turned into a pauper's den. What kin we do, I'd like to know? I've got an old bed-ridden mother, and five little cubs, one on 'em blind, and a month back at the store. What am I goin' to do? Where'll I get work? An' he brings in new men every day, an' if a man dares to stan' up for his rights, off he goes. 'Twan't so in Reardon's time, and old Ellicott never ground the soul out of a man in that way. I say everybody oughter rise and drum Vennard out of the place. It's that, or starvin' for us an' our children!”

“What's the row with Forbes?” asked Dane.

“Bin discharged; four on 'em.”

Thomas Vennard's anger had spent itself here, when it might have been vented on him. Perhaps better.

From the bottom of his heart he pitied Forbes, thinking of the home where want must soon stare them in the face, unless charity fed them.

Forbes had commenced again. He was spokesman for the party, and ill-judged as his harangue was, it contained a certain amount of truth and rugged eloquence, interspersed with now and then a vengeful oath.

Some one touched Dane's shoulder. Turning, he beheld Adams.

"Come along," said the latter, almost crossly.

Stephen looked fairly at him, with an expression that said, proudly enough, —

"My sympathies are here."

"I know it," the other answered, as if the look had been words: "but what good do you do, listening to an angry man's denunciation of something he doesn't understand?"

"He seems to understand that he and his children may starve."

"When you want to demolish a solid stone wall, it's best not to take your fist. Forbes and Benner have carried their point a little too far. Mr. Vennard doesn't allow of but *one* master. They knew it. They had seen it tried before."

He was leading Stephen away.

"We don't look at these things in the same light," said Dane, in a resolute tone. "You don't like Vennard, yet you always stand up for him."

"From a principle you would call cowardly and selfish, I suppose. I think it is best that the workmen should learn that he is to be obeyed. If you want the employment, you must take it on his terms. There's no other large iron works around here. He *can* dictate, and he means to. It's fighting against the stone wall, as I said."

"And a man's to give up all his independence, all his spirit, his sense of what is right and just —"

"Dane, you are a little too far on one side. Vennard is a hard master in some respects, I grant, but he pays the men as well as they have ever been paid before, —"

"And works them twice as hard!" was the bitter interruption.

"I think they had fallen into very idle, disorderly habits. It takes pretty hard discipline to bring such men around straight. Vennard's had a sharp way of doing it, I grant you, but he hasn't asked for any more than his own. When he went down and found Forbes and some of the others playing 'seven up,' he discharged them on the spot. That they had only been playing a few moments, while there was nothing for them to do, was no excuse whatever in his eyes. It was *his* time they were using for their own gratification. And in trying to justify themselves, they made him still more angry. He wasn't in the best of humor, you know."

"It was a mean shame! And Forbes is a good, honest workman. He doesn't pull off his apron with the first stroke of the bell. I've seen him stop minutes to finish something."

"Mr. Vennard doesn't ask that. He wouldn't take a favor from a workman. When he gets what he has paid for, he is satisfied, but he wants every inch of that. You were right when you said I didn't like him. I might brave him to-morrow, and the next day find a new place. I've no family to keep me here, or to starve, if I was out of work a while. But since I've taken the position, and know pretty well what he wants, I'll satisfy him if it's in my power. I think I can do it without losing my independence, except just so much as I knowingly relinquished when I made my bargain. A person in an inferior position has to yield something. Why not do it with a good grace?"

Stephen Dane walked along moodily. Presently a savage glow shot out of his eye.

"It's always the way! These men with money and power are tyrants."

"Yes, you find it so pretty often."

"And is the world to go on so forever? Are the rich always to grind the souls of the poor?"

"The world's a big place, Dane. And there are many noble exceptions, I am glad to admit. We have fallen upon one of the hard problems. Ven-

nard has a narrow mind, and cannot see consequences. He thinks his system is perfect. But there is such a thing as crowding on too much steam. Whether he will be able to find men to fill these places five years hence, is a question !”

“Then he’ll shut up the place. I can’t fancy Vennard giving in. But as Forbes said, he will make Tregony a pauper’s den.”

“Yes. These men can never see, after all. When you teach a workman to respect himself, to be provident, to educate his children, to lay up a little money if possible, you have made a good citizen for the state, a man whose honor you can depend on. You will not have to be taxed for his support in the poorhouse. But Vennard looks only at to-day. He wants the work done so he can see the immediate profits. I don’t know that heaven or earth could convert him to any other way of thinking. So the men must study self-interest. Since it is necessary for them to have employment, they must abide by his laws. They are in no position to dictate.”

“It’s a burning, bitter shame,” broke in Dane, with the scornful indignation of a generous man.

“But one must take the world as he finds it ;” and Adams shrugged his shoulders. He had many good impulses, but he would never have made a philanthropist.

They halted at the corner, where their paths diverged.

"Leave these men to settle their squabbles, Dane, and think of the engine. There's a fortune for some one in that," Adams said, as a parting rejoinder.

But Stephen Dane was in no mood for such thought. He felt angry and sick at heart, with a sense of black injustice all around him. Why did power and wealth ever come to such men as Thomas Vennard? Was there a God who kept watch of these matters, checking them off when they reached a certain point?

He had been to church the Sunday before with Joe, in all the glory of her new bonnet. A little Episcopalian Chapel, and in their reading of the Psalter these words had stirred him strangely: —

"I myself have seen the ungodly in great power, and flourishing like a green bay tree.

"I went by, and lo, he was gone."

Thomas Vennard, so strongly intrenched, could not be easily removed. Dane little knew how he was destined to think of this again.

IV.

BY THE RIVER.

IF Joe failed to understand Stephen, and misinterpreted his desire for her improvement, she was not ignorant of a keener sensation of happiness than any she had hitherto known; and at the same moment a new capability for pain dawned upon her. Stephen came so near to her in some matters, was so widely sundered in others. And whatever took him from her—the tavern, the garden-plot he cultivated this summer, his books, or a call at intervals from Mr. Adams—were all regarded with a vague, dull jealousy. He was better-tempered than in his first essay after knowledge. His heart had grown broader, his patience of a finer quality. His first impulse had been to leave Tregony, and carve out a new life for himself, distinct from her's and his father's. Some subtle tie held him back. Naturally, I think, the man had a very affectionate heart.

So he staid, and tried to raise them out of this slough *he* meant to leave behind. It *was* hard work. Archy

Dane found more comfort in the tavern than in his son's society. Joe was prouder of her new finery than any mental improvement. She had no ambition, but all a woman's tender, longing desire—foolish also, if you will—to be loved. And when Stephen was tender, it seemed as if the blessing was not so far distant. More than that she did not understand in him. That he might be rich some day never entered her head. That he might gain some higher station was equally improbable to her. In fact, why should he want it? Were not these common-place people around them happy enough? They were all she cared to know about.

Not so with Stephen Dane. His brain had been fired with new thoughts; and, though only half comprehended, he meant to work them up into something higher than this dogging on year after year. He wanted something sharp, incisive. Pain, even, and failure, were better than stagnation. And, somewhere in the distance, life looked noble and chivalric, the vulgarities cleared off, the meannesses drowned out by an overflow of soul. For a man *had* something within him, call it instinct, or even ambition.

It was hard work. No one that would understand these daring thoughts, even if he had the courage to confess them. Not even Adams. He could see how Dane might like to invent, or improve on a machine. So much steel, and iron, and steam was a child to him. He gave it the love of husband and father. He would

spend his life for it. It was a mania with the man ; and though he occasionally ran foul of some "ism," he was not sufficiently interested in it to spend much time or thought combating it. The greatest elevation the world wanted, in his eyes, was in machinery. As to morals and virtues, it always had done well enough, and always would. So there was a point where contact between the two men ceased.

Perhaps the grace, beauty, and culture of a lost generation woke to existence in Stephen Dane. Some whim of blood, having long lain dormant, was exerting itself. He saw a possibility in the steam-engine ; but beyond it, a broader and grander one, a sphere of refinement, an ease, a certain elegance, such as little Hope Vennard shook out of every fold of her dress. Her father was narrow and hard, but it did not cling to her. And when he had won a place in the world, when he had acquired the ease, the education, he meant to have, the home with its books, and pictures, and fascinating repose, — this was what he could not tell ; this was what made the great gulf between him and Joe.

He went on with sturdy courage. He had too much hard work on hand to stick fast in the tangled depths where John Gilbert floundered. And though his soul was vexed with the selfishness, injustice, and crime that stalked about rampant, he knew his beginning must be small : Joe, his father, and himself. After that, a wider range.

They studied the engine daily, he and Adams. He had much natural quickness of understanding, penetration, and that subtile knowledge connecting cause with effect. Here Adams was slower. Yet they both seemed as far from the discovery as Mr. Vennard.

The affair with Forbes had created quite an excitement. When the man's anger had cooled somewhat, and stern necessity stared him blankly in the face, he had humbled himself sufficiently to solicit back his old place. Mr. Vennard was immovable. No entreaties could soften him. It was a rule he had never broken, and never would. The men knew one discharge was final. And so Forbes, with the passion of desperation, joined the disaffected, drank bad rum, and made threatening speeches. Thomas Vennard did not care. Quiet Tregony would have dreamed of the judgment-day as soon as of a murderer lying in wait; so the threats were treated as idle bravado, and remembered at a later day, when they proved well nigh fatal.

One July afternoon Stephen Dane went into the engine-room for some particular screws he wanted. It was used as a sort of general receptacle rather than a work-room. Here lay prostrate fly-wheels of different sizes, walking-beams for fast river-boats, cross-heads and piston-rods, lighter machinery for manufacturing purposes, waiting for some hand to put them together in their proper order, and the breath of steam to endow them with life. A dim atmosphere, smoky and dusty,

yet bronzed to a certain beauty by the broad sheets of sunlight that flowed in at the windows, grimy and cobwebbed as they were. It always appeared so strangely still in here to Stephen; and yet he could hear the roar of the fires below, the clang of hammers, the continuous rattle of bars and chains in transit. Here was the engine that had defied Thomas Vennard. If it had been human — and Stephen Dane gave a sort of grim smile. Being iron, it was not susceptible to the master's frowns, neither could it be discharged.

He leaned his elbow on the eccentric-rod, and peered down into its black depths. What secret did it hold? These wheels and valves, this burnished steel, and silvery-gray iron. What power was mighty enough to extort a confession? Was there a fortune in it, as Adams had said? He needed the fortune sorely. Money would do so much for him — give him leisure and cultivation, time and material for experiments. What torture could he apply to this great dumb thing? And unconsciously he ground his teeth and clenched his hands. How many times he and Adams had inspected it! There was a drawing in his pocket he had brought to show the foreman, who was absent to-day from sudden illness. He took it out, and went over it with his pencil, comparing, computing. He had hit upon something at length, a slight difference; but it might be of momentous import to them. If Adams were but here!

He did not see the cool, keen eye that glanced in

upon him, the compressed lips and significant nod, as the paper and pencil became visible. A sort of evil, tyrannical look, that meant to be doubly paid for this patience. No, for a sudden moment of inspiration came to Stephen Dane. I think Thomas Vennard understood as much, watching the working of the face. The dull, earthy look faded out of it. The eyes grew luminous. The fingers could hardly keep pace with the thoughts.

Whenever Stephen Dane lived over this period, it seemed to him like a flash, a breath. Five minutes, at the utmost, he would have said, from the time he entered the room, intent upon the screws, until a slow, metallic voice startled him.

"I'll take that now, Dane, if you are through with it."

The hot blood rushed to Stephen Dane's face as he beheld Mr. Vennard. He was utterly speechless.

"Do you hear me?" sternly, and thrusting out his hand until the bony fingers almost settled themselves upon the paper.

Dane drew back, all the man within him roused. He knew he had come to an issue with the master, the very thing he had hitherto tried to avoid. But now it must be met.

"I wanted some screws," he began, in a wandering, uncertain manner, as if but half awake.

"And I want that paper. Give it to me, and we'll call it square. An hour of my time. It belongs to me."

Both men glanced at it. The eager light in Vennard's eyes startled Stephen Dane. If that little plan was worth anything, it was of value to him.

"An hour!" he said. "I have not been here an hour."

"Do you mean to tell me that I lie? I passed that door one hour ago, and you were here."

Vennard's overreaching defeated itself by violence. Every fibre of independence in Stephen Dane's nature was roused.

"No, Mr. Vennard," he said, with a cool spirit that exasperated the other. I had no such thought. It seems the briefest moment to me, and yet you may be right. I am willing to lose the time."

It was to be a hand-to-hand fight. Bullying would gain nothing here.

The two men eyed each other closely. Dane saw that his race in the Ellicott Works was run; Vennard read that he had a powerful adversary.

"I want that paper. Dane, if you have a grain of common honesty, — honor we don't expect from such men, — you will see that I had a right to the time. And this improvement is mine. You have no business with anything pertaining to it."

He overshot the mark widely that time. How easily a little passion leads a man astray!

"Except what my own brains give me."

"I say you have *no* right. Try one experiment, if you dare, and I will restrain you by an injunction."

"Some proof may be required for your priority. And *some* men"—there was a peculiar emphasis on this that stung the master—"might see a point of honor and right where you did not."

Vennard's face turned livid with rage. The manhood in Stephen Dane asserted itself proudly. He stood erect and strong.

"This comes of familiarity;" and Vennard ground his heel into the floor with a savage force. "I've seen you and Adams conniving together, and all I have to tell him is, that he won't interfere with any more men in this place! I want every man to mind his own business here. And if I can't be master—"

"Not of souls, nor brains."

"Brains! A workman has no business with 'em! Who wants him to think or to order? I can do that. All that is required of you is to work. That's what I hire you for. You've no right to come in here and make drawings. It's just as much robbery as if you put your hand in my pocket!"

A swarthy flush of passion crept over Stephen Dane's face.

"A man has a right to his own thoughts. You disdain to hire his brains, I believe."

"I tell you, when he comes into this place, he's mine. My money buys every moment of his time and energy. His thoughts should be on *my* work; and if they are not, I say he defrauds me—that he is a thief."

The two men glared at each other.

"Very well," Dane said, slowly. "My time ended this noon. An hour or two extra I will throw in, lest I may have unwittingly defrauded you some time. Now we are quits. The world is wide, and there are more places in it than Tregony."

Thomas Vennard caught his breath in utter amazement. He had heard men bluster and swear; he had seen them cower in sullen rage; but this one did neither. Those fearless eyes — why, if he should look long enough, they might even master him. And discharging himself! Taking the very words out of *his* mouth!

He opened his pocket-book, and, snatching a bill therefrom, handed it to Stephen Dane.

"There's your wages until to-night. Give me that paper."

Instead Dane handed him a dollar in change.

"I want no more than belongs to me," he said, proudly. "I have not robbed you of anything. There is your engine — you have the means and the time to perfect it. Do it, if you can. And if some other man is before you, the law will protect him."

"Dane, you shall rue this to the latest day of your life. If your improvement had been worth anything, I might have done something for you. As it is, I am your enemy." He hissed it through his dull, purple lips. "You'll find out what that means. No one ever

yet thwarted me who didn't smart for it. I have money, and that gives a man a long arm. I can reach you in other places than Tregony. You'll see, blind, ignorant fool that you are !”

Stephen Dane gained a victory over himself when he made no reply. Recriminations were useless, and the threat seemed idle. He had a morbid antipathy to brawls and quarrels. He looked Mr. Vennard steadily in the eye a moment. That hard, narrow, sordid face ! Then he turned, and went down.

Not into the large shop, but by a worn side stairway, that took him to the very spot where he had once stood with little Hope Vennard in his arms — where she had kissed him. Would she ever know the bitterness of her father's tyranny ? If she should love where he hated ! Ah, and a quick shiver passed over Stephen.

He marched through the yard, hardly realizing the events of the last ten minutes. How strange the world looked !

An hour ago he was wild for leisure. Now there was plenty of it. He had nothing more to do in Tregony.

And then he asked himself where there was anything for him to do. Leisure was a rich man's luxury, and he — why, this ten dollars was about all he had in the world. He had always brought his money home, and put it in a little tin box in the cupboard. Every one went to it. The household expenses, the clothing, and

his father's rum, came out of it. Frequently it was all gone before Saturday night. For the last month or two, he had meant to institute a new system; but Joe had grown sulky when he undertook to explain economy.

"If you know so well, why don't you manage yourself?" she had retorted, crossly. "May be you think I'm not honest."

"O, no, Joe!" he had answered, with sudden pain. He had a great, tender, womanish heart, and pitied this poor girl strangely now. And so the subject had been dropped.

He went out of the Foundry yard, as I have said. A magnificent summer day, a sky of royal beauty, an air of fragrance. Leaving the smoke and din behind, he struck off for the woods, a mile, perhaps, below the Foundry. He wanted to be all alone, to think, to look the problem straight in the face.

O, the heavenly rest and quiet of those dense trees! O, the coolness, the tenderness, with which they stretched out their long green arms. Soft mosses under foot, or the path cushioned with the fallen leaves of many autumns, so steeped in summer moisture that they gave no rustle to the tread. Long wreaths of wild vines hanging from tree to tree with clusters of pale green berries. Here a gnarled old trunk was covered with a glossy-leaved parasite; there its gray bark was moss-grown, or fallen into phosphorescent decay. It

was so still on this day, broken occasionally by the song of a bird, but that not frequently. The place of all others for a man to be alone with God and his own soul.

He wandered slowly through it to a little point that jutted out into the river. Seating himself on a rock, he glanced over at the other shore. A golden shimmer in the air brooded tenderly on the opposite hills. Vistas of light and shade, mown meadows like a smooth sea, and clumps of trees stretching out indefinitely until they joined the blue horizon. The river flowing placidly with its murmurous rustle, trembling in the soft dun haze, the liquid light filling the midsummer air, lulled him into peaceful repose. O, if one could be Nature's child, take root in this soft mould, and grow up into a vigorous tree, with no blights or gnarls, no shocks to warp or stunt. Drinking in summer dews and showers, warming with baths of golden sunlight, spreading out green branches above, and tough, sinewy roots below, until one came to be a giant, and braved any blast. No thought for the morrow. No care for to-day. Yes, tree and shrub, and rock and river, knew what it was to live the life God had made for them. Did they enjoy it?

He glanced down the shadowy shore. Cardinal flowers hung out their scarlet flags; the sagittaria lifted its blue spire from amongst arrowy leaves—a knight sallying forth to deeds of prowess. Through the

shallow water at the edge darted myriads of tireless insects; here a soft, pink snail came creeping up a wet, slimy stone, thrusting out slender horns, and dragging his cumbrous house after him. Worms crept in and out of the damp sand, enjoying their sluggish life with so pure a zest that he almost envied them. God took care of them. There was a God for sinless Nature.

And what for himself? A quick, sharp pang struck his heart again. There was a fierce struggle before him — how to begin?

First, he must leave Tregony. Walk, work his way somehow until he came to a new place, where he could dare toil again. But Joe and his father?

They must be left behind for the present. Perhaps for all time. They could go on quietly here, he providing for them. And being free to live his own life without any drawbacks, to think, to study, to follow out the ideas struggling through his brain with such mighty throes, he might come to some higher point at the last — some clear sailing.

Then he thought of Thomas Vennard. Everything about him turning to gold. A mean, grasping, avaricious man, and yet prospered in everything he undertook. Did God mean it to be so? Did He make some men lucky, and smile to see others forever grinding at fortune's wheel? Did it matter whether a man was upright, honest, and generous? These unlucky men nearly always were. Somewhere matters had gone wrong,

but who was mighty enough to right them? Who could take the power out of these unjust hands, and change selfish hearts into noble ones?

If he only had a little money, — five hundred dollars, say, — he could start fair, and turn his back upon fate. Five hundred! A paltry sum to Vennard, but a fortune for him. It stood for all the blessings that could crown his life. Leisure for his hungry brain, a pleasant home, companionship such as he thirsted for, books, experiments, success. In this slow way, with the burdens he must carry, it would be years before he could save it.

He took the precious roll of drawings out of his pocket. Cylinders, valves, rods — an odd lot of diagrams. Adams had discovered genius in it. He felt certain now that he could make it work. Give him a chance for his life, without this cursed mill-stone of poverty hanging forever to his neck, and he would make it a fair thing. But this black ghost — could he never get rid of it? What if he began to grind his fellow-men — make them stepping-stones to his own advancement. Why, it was done every day. And then he smiled with a sort of hard scorn.

The sun, going westward, threw his side of the shore into a dense shade, but made the other a mass of rosy gold. So lovely it appeared, so enticing with its tremulous glitter, that he forgot his care, the sharp pain and hunger tugging at his heart, shut his eyes,

and leaning back against the mossy bole of a tree, gave himself up to dreams.

What was it he heard in a dim sort of way, floating through his brain? The cry of some homeward bird calling to his mate? That would not be so sharp with pain. How deathly still all the air was in answer! It made him shiver.

He rose presently, and took a few steps forward. Why, what was that? A heavy, sullen plash in the water. Almost at his very feet, he thought at first. He clambered out on the farthest rock, and strained his eyes around the point. The shore was so indented with little nooks, so broken to vision by the trees growing, in some places, to the very water's edge, and overhanging it. But he saw the eddies far up, dimpling out towards the middle of the river, and slowly floating down. If God was looking out of that clear summer sky, what did He see?

Stephen Dane took his way along the river's edge, swinging around the trees, striding over the stones, and occasionally giving a lurch into the water. Some strange impulse urged him on. When he reached the spot, the waves had not yet subsided into quiet. The bank was higher here, — a sort of bluff; the river deeper, and so shaded that he could not see clearly to the bottom — if there had been anything to see, which there was not. Probably a loosened stone had rolled down.

He turned now to take the shortest cut out of the woods. The trees were less dense, the grass quite rank. It had been freshly trampled, and, O God! what was this? He stooped down to examine the sharp edge of a stone. A clot of blood, and human skin, a wisp of coarse brown hair matted in it!

There are some strange moments in life. Stephen Dane, without knowing why he did it, wrenched this stone from its foundation, rolled it over, keeping his eyes away from this terrible sign of crime, and gave it a vigorous push into the river. Then he fitted a smaller one in its place, covering up the spiders, worms, and lion-ants, that were hurrying in every direction. Some curious spell held him in a giant's grasp. He glanced furtively through the trees, he took a lingering survey of the place, and then cautiously threaded his way out. The shadows grew weird and spectral. He stepped lightly, and drew strange, half-repressed breaths. Then he stumbled over the root of a tree, and kicked something that was not a stone. He passed it first, returned, groped about until he found it. A memorandum and note book with dark leather covers. On the first page was written in a stiff, but legible hand, "Thomas Vennard, Tregony, 18—."

He struck his forehead in a wild, startled way. He looked through the dim branches with staring eyeballs, transfixed by a horrible thought that seemed to cleave through his brain. Did the lifeless body of Thomas

Vennard, the man he had so lately envied, lie over yonder in the river? The cold sweat started at every pore. His limbs trembled violently. His teeth chattered. A faint, sickening sensation stole over him. He here with the murdered man's property in his hands! Some awful fascination compelled him to clutch it tightly, when he would have thrown it from him. Then he staggered on, reeling like a drunken man.

A step startled him. Coming in this direction, too. By the straggling sunlight, whose last beams gave an orange-red glow, he recognized the figure, the shambling gait. O Heaven! was his father's very life put into his hands!

V.

AT THE STAKE.

WHEN Archy Dane met his son, his thin, gray face grew deathly white. His knees smote together, his hands fell limp and helpless by his side, and his lips twitched nervously.

"Stephen!" he exclaimed, in a faint, sickly voice, more of terror than surprise. His lank jaws fell as if stricken with palsy.

"Were you looking for me, father?"

It was a strange question, as Stephen himself knew, after he had put it, but it had come first into his mind.

"No — I —" The voice was broken with agonish trembling.

"It's growing dark in the woods."

"Yes." No movement followed this. Only the two men breathing hoarse and fearfully.

"Joe will have supper ready by the time we reach home."

"Go on, boy," he said roughly, albeit in a tremulous tone.

Stephen Dane was shocked with the crime that had been so foully committed there by the river's edge. This man's hands were red with blood, his soul black with a stain, only God could wipe off. His own father! Had he been sent to save him?

Perhaps because his own heart had been so bitter a while ago, he experienced a deep pity for this poor old man. Yet his lips must be sealed now and forever.

"Well," he returned, "don't wait out late."

Presently he looked back, and saw the bent figure groping around in the falling darkness. Then he only heard a faint rustle, and could see nothing. But he knew two bony hands were hunting over the moss and dead leaves, for something he carried in his pocket.

He skulked along a back lane nearer the river. How lonely it was in this amethyst glow! How the long hills drooped with purple shadows, their outlines lost in soft indistinctness! Gray half lights upon the bolder rocks, faint touches of red along the shore, where filmy threads of vapor began to curl. The hollow blue of the upper sky seemed a haven in which these fleets of gold might come to anchor in an untroubled sea of rest. Where was there any rest for him?

The bright reflection had entirely disappeared behind the hills when Stephen reached home. Supper had been waiting upon the table a long time. The johnny-

cake stood back from the fire, its crisp, golden tint degenerated into brown. Joe was cross with the delay.

"You've got to goin' off to the tavern again," she flung out angrily. "It's enough to try the patience of a saint. Supper's been waitin' this hour."

"No, I haven't been to the tavern."

The hollow voice startled her. She looked intently at Stephen. He *felt* that his face was fearfully haggard.

"What's the matter? And where's father?"

"How should I know? We won't wait for him."

"The johnny-cake was so nice! It's a'most baked to death now;" and Joe's voice was rather conciliatory.

"No matter."

"One of those meetin's again, Stephen?"

"No" — absently.

"They're goin' to cut the timber off the P'int, and build a new mill."

"They? Who?" Stephen started as if struck by an unseen hand.

"Company, I b'lieve. Jake Fawcett's wife told me. They want Mr. Vennard to go look at it first. Cu'ris that nothin' can't be done a'thout he has a finger in the pie."

Stephen was too much excited to notice Joe's elisions. He choked down a mouthful of the johnny-cake. For all taste it had to him, it might as well have been

compounded of chaff. This errand was what had called Mr. Vennard to that fatal spot. But his father — How solve the mystery?

"You're stupid to-night, Stephen," Joe said, angrily. "One might as well talk to a stick."

"Am I?" His voice had a dreary patience in it, as if he had begun to wait for something that would never come. He sipped his tea with long breaths between. When Joe was not looking he flung portions of his supper to the wistful-eyed dog. Presently he rose.

"I do wish father'd come. Goin' out again?"

"No."

Then Joe, having failed in all her efforts at conversation, lapsed into sullen silence. Stephen seated himself on the window-ledge, and looked down the lane.

Nothing came of his watching. Gray night closed them in. One by one the stars were set in pale, penetrable wreaths of fleecy clouds. The surge of the river floated upon the night air, bringing wafts of dewy fragrance. Joe went out to gossip with a neighbor. In that strange, still night, Stephen's thoughts whirled in wildest chaos. It was his misery that nothing could be done. No plans laid. No precautions taken. Some times he resolved to go away without any explanation, but he shivered at the suspicion it might arouse. Had any one heard the words that had passed between him and Mr. Vennard? There was a long afternoon to account for. And here in his pocket was the

memorandum-book. What must he do with that? If found in this house, father or son must answer for the deed.

He lighted a candle, and went up to his room, fastening the door behind him. Then he drew forth the book and opened it. Full of daily jottings in pencil, one or two receipts, a plan for boiler and steam-chest, and some bank bills, laid out straight, with a crisp, fresh look, although not new. Six fifties and ten twenties — five hundred dollars!

This was what had tempted his old father. This was what he had gone back to search for. A few hours ago Stephen had been wishing for just this. It would give him the means to perfect his engine, start him on the road to fortune. Ah, if it were only his, with no stain of blood upon it!

He put the money back, and shut the book. What should he do with it? hold it there in the flame until it was all consumed? Or, better still, take it down stairs and lay it upon the coals? Destroy this sure and fatal evidence.

But the money?

He had not robbed; he had not—but a shiver choked off the words. Still, why should the money be wasted? More than this had Thomas Vennard wrung out of his workmen. Mrs. Vennard and the child would have an abundance. Little sunny-haired Hope!

Yes, it would do so much for him; give him the

knowledge for which he was madly thirsting ; save them all, perhaps ; take them out of this horrible, grovelling life. It had come to him by one of those blind chances of fate. Was it best to destroy it ?

He stood there a long while, with a devil at his elbow. To send it back in any manner would be certain detection. Was he not answerable for his father's life ? No, it could not be returned.

His tall figure swayed to and fro in the intense excitement ; his knees smote weakly together ; his fingers trembled and clutched at each other, as if for support. His eyes stared wildly about, and he stood there moment after moment, scarcely breathing.

Joe's step sounded on the threshold. He darted one quick glance around. There was a chink in the chimney, by the rafter. He thrust it in, muttering, " For to-night only."

He opened the door, and went stumbling down stairs, candle in hand, but keeping his face averted from Joe. Everything about him seemed so unreal ! This yellow flicker of light ; that ghostly pine table, to-day sand-scrubbed to new whiteness by Joe ; the blank space of the doorway, and the shadowy windows. A kind of dazed, dreamy terror was stealing over him, a terror that stupefied. He walked in obedience to some mechanical law, not because he willed. He seemed to have no sentience, to be a sort of breathing machine, guided by blind instinct.

"Are you sick, Stephen?" . . .

Joe's tone had in it a thread of curious awe.

"No. I believe I'll go and look after father."

He reached down his old hat, and walked slowly to the end of the lane. He fancied that he must be losing his reason, so slowly did every thought come, and with such a great effort. What was lying in the depths of the river? A stone, with a clot of human flesh and blood. Anything else? Would it float up to the surface some day, and tell its own hideous tale? Would there be any marks, fingers at the throat, or a grip that might disprove accident?

And what had Archy Dane betrayed over his cups? He was not greatly given to being close-mouthed. No steps coming along the road. The town clocks rang out ten on the balmy summer air. In this deathly stillness Stephen could hear his heart beat. What was this unutterable glory of earth and sky to him? In a mood of feeble passion he wondered why he had been created! What was life, even after the threescore and ten years had been reached? And yet he felt a power growing up in his heart with great giant strides. It was not all dull clay. A fierce power struggling for utterance. Somewhere a spark like a diamond, that, held in certain lights, shot out arrowy, golden rays. Was that a man's soul? Would he ever come to full stature, then? He had seen theories applied to cold, inanimate iron that warmed it into life, gave it a vitality, so to

speaking, that astonished the world. All this money might have done for him.

And then he thought of the blear-eyed man down at the tavern. He could not go there to-night. If, in a weak, unconscious moment, Archy Dane had loosened his hold on the slippery neck of his secret, and trusted it to the gaping, gossiping crew, what then?

The moments lengthened out intolerably. The chirp of insects in the neighboring thicket grew faint and drowsy. The stars overhead sailed through fleecy drifts, sometimes half obscured. In spite of midsummer warmth, he felt chilled to the very marrow.

A shuffling, irregular step. He heard it when a long way off, and went out to meet his father.

"Keep away!" the thick, guttural voice blurted, accompanying it with a feeble brandishing of the arms.

"It is I—Stephen."

"O, Stephen." The tone became one of whining terror. "Doggin' your poor old father around!"

The young man caught him by the shoulder, almost fiercely.

"What have you been talking about down at the tavern?"

"Nothin', Stephen. I ain't told nothin'" — piteously.

A strange emotion sped along Stephen's veins. He drew the shaky arm within his own. In spite of all, there was a bond between them, subtle and strong; a tie of blood that could not be easily rent asunder. This

life was his to save, or to destroy. Did justice ask it at his hands? What reparation could the utmost of this feeble soul and body make? A solemn tenderness came over him, a weak, womanish shrinking. If God managed these things in His own way, if He brought every evil deed to light some time, why not wait until that day came, and not vex himself with vain questions?

He held up the trembling figure; he even seemed to put new life in the straggling limbs by his own firm step. But he did not dare trust himself with a reply. He wanted to hear no confession. So they walked up to the cottage door, when the old man lagged back, and appeared unwilling to enter.

"It's late," Stephen said, "and you are tired, father."

Joe sprang up from the settle, where she had fallen asleep, rubbed her eyes, and snuffed the candle.

Stephen lighted another, and took it into his father's room, the old man following. And all the while he was helping him to bed, he never glanced into his face. Then he went up stairs, but not to sleep. All night the man's soul travailed in strong agony, though his lips were dry and dumb, and could utter no moan. He did not even pray to be delivered from any danger, but just endured, with a sort of sullen hardihood. At morning's dawn he sat there on the window sill, his brow pressed against the glass, his eyes strained far over the river, but seeing nothing in the gray distance. No promise, no hope.

When Joe had breakfast ready, he forced himself to eat. His father was sleeping soundly in the adjoining room. It came to Joe, although she was not very keen-sighted, that never in her whole life had she seen Stephen's face wear such an expression. It chilled her into silence. Only when he rose and took down his hat, from force of habit, she said, —

"I want some flour, Stephen. I forgot it yesterday. You'll have time to stop before you go to work, and some one's always there."

"I wasn't going to the Foundery," he answered, slowly. "Did you want a barrel?"

"Yes." Then curiosity mastered her. "What's up, Stephen?"

He felt that it must come. Perhaps, indeed, before night he would be in jail, and the terrible story in every one's mouth.

"I was discharged yesterday."

"What for? What you goin' to do?"

"I don't know" — in a vague, absent tone.

"You can't go back?"

"No."

"That hateful old Vennard! He'll keep on till he drives every man to ruin. I wish he —"

"Hush, Joe." He said it with white, quivering lips. Then he turned away.

Joe left the table as it was, made her own bed, and tidied her room, and, hearing no stir on her uncle's

part, went to Stephen's. His bed in perfect order! what did it mean? How strange Stephen was! Something on his mind always. Looking out of the window, she drummed idly on the sash, and speculated. Stephen had never been the same since he took to following John Gilbert about. And this Adams — What had occurred at the Foundry? In a blind way she espoused Stephen's side, whatever the trouble might be.

She turned, at length, and took up her broom. The chimney ran up close by the window, and a long, hanging dust-web caught her eye. Sweeping it slowly down, she espied a book lodged there in the crevice. The space was too narrow for fingers. Joe glanced around, then broke a twig of woodbine just outside, stripped off the leaves, and used it for a lever. The book fell into the other hand she was holding for support, and some papers fluttered out. Bank bills! For some seconds she was motionless with surprise.

Josephine Dane had none of that nice honor and delicate self-respect born in some women. She felt that of late Stephen had rather defrauded her in the matter of confidence; and if she could learn anything in this way, she had no scruples to hold her back. So she turned the leaves slowly.

Thomas Vennard's property.

Then she counted the money, and replaced it. Five hundred dollars.

She stared around in a blank, puzzled manner. How

did Stephen come by this? Hidden away, too! Was he a thief? But her cheek burned indignantly at the thought. Did he mean to take it back? Had it anything to do with his being discharged? Joe's brain was in a sad whirl.

If the money was only theirs! Why, she had never seen half so much together. They could build the new room Stephen had been talking about; they could have carpet and chairs; and may be he would give her a silk dress. But then it ought to be a wedding dress; and here Joe sighed.

She concluded at last that he would surely return it. Perhaps he was waiting for Mr. Vennard to offer a reward. That was right enough. How odd that he should have put it just there, and she should have seen it! If she dared tease him a little!

She dropped it back into its hiding-place, and swept the room. Then, hearing her uncle stumbling about, she ran down, with a most innocent face.

Archy Dane had reached the settle. His blood-shot eyes were staring around, with an eager, frightened look. His face was dismally gray, the lips pinched and colorless.

"He's had a bustèr this time," thought Joe; but she said aloud, "Will you have some breakfast?"

"Where's Stephen?"—feebly and piteously.

"Why, it's after seven;" and Joe forced a short, discordant laugh. Was the world being turned upside down?

"Stephen's a good boy. He allers was. He won't stan' by and see his old father 'bused. Is the Foundery open, Joe?"

"Lord! Why should the Foundery be shut up? You're half fuddled."

He looked up at her, his eyes glazing over with dull terror.

"I don't want any breakfast, Joe" — staggering up. "Take me back to bed. And if anybody comes, send for Stephen. He'll stan' by me. He's a good boy — Stephen. He's all I've got;" and the old man maundered on, while Joe cleared away the dishes, her usually torpid brain roused to new activity.

Meanwhile Stephen Dane had gone down the street, in a slow, irresolute manner, peering cautiously into the faces of those he passed, as he gave his familiar, half-abstracted nod. Arrived at the flouting-mill, he went in and did his errand. As he took out his money he thought of the hundreds at home with a bright red mark upon them. This was honestly earned and free from stain. He fingered it with a little manly pride; but as he recalled the bitter sneers that had come with it, his brow grew fiercely hot.

He lingered until the Foundery bell rang. Some one said, —

"Taking a holiday, Dane?"

He gave a sickly smile, but had not the courage to own the truth. Had no one heard?

Two men halted, seeing him standing in the door. One was Forbes.

"Dane," he asked, "what's the row down yonder? Doesn't any one know where Vennard is? He's plaguy close-mouthed; but he wouldn't go off without a word to any one — would he?"

Stephen Dane made a great effort. "Gone off where?" he asked, incredulously.

"Why, man, haven't you heard? haven't you been down to the Foundry?"

"No."

"They're all up in arms. Mrs. Vennard sent over — he wasn't home last night — didn't leave any message. No one can tell anything about him. Fact. You needn't look as if you didn't believe a fellow!"

"He might have had business," said Dane, speaking over a great lump in his throat.

"He'd a' told time-keeper, any how. And it's mighty odd. There's no love lost atween Vennard and some o' the men."

"You don't mean —" and Mr. Bross paused amid the bags he was lifting.

"I don't mean anything special," said Forbes. "Only, if an accident *had* happened to him, I know a few who wouldn't make their black very expensive. He's a mean old niggard. It was a sorry day for Tregony when he came into it. And I'll bless the Lord for the day he goes

out o' it. I don't see why God lets such men live and prosper."

Forbes was growing excited. Stephen Dane shivered.

"Wasn't he home last night?" asked Mr. Bross.

"No. And it ain't just his style to go off without a word. It looks queer."

Dane could not endure the talk; so he stepped out. The glare of the sunlight in the street blinded him. How strange this glowing wealth of summer appeared, when human souls were hourly dying and leaving it all! Then his mind wandered to the secluded spot in the river, where some one lay sleeping never to waken again.

Some inexplicable whim dragged him to the Foundry. His breath came hard and short; every nerve in his body seemed bare and exposed to a biting blast. The fearful expectation of something kept his senses alert and keen, yet his outward self was as rigid as if slowly turning to stone.

No gate-keeper peering suspiciously out at the entrance. A knot of men in the office—groups elsewhere, talking and gesticulating, their faces full of dumb wonder. What if he went to his place and worked as usual? A whole day's idleness would drive him crazy. He paused in the wide doorway.

"Pretty work this, Dane!" ejaculated a gruff foreman. "Everybody's about cracked, I think. As if

Vennard didn't know his own business ! There'll be a nice breeze when he comes back. What you gaping there for ? You was off all yesterday afternoon. Go to work."

Then the man did not know he had been discharged. He hung up his hat and coat, tied on his leathern apron, and went to work with a resolute will. Yet his mind was full of busy thoughts — an island floating in a dim sea of space, with no sure rock for foundation.

By noon the excitement had increased. About four on the preceding afternoon Mr. Vennard had been seen to leave the Foundry. He had gone to the office of Slocum & Adsley, to discuss the new mill, and had promised to view the site, and give his opinion of it. No one had seen him since. The place had been searched, but not a vestige discovered. Inquiries had been made everywhere. Mr. Ellicott had telegraphed to several business friends in the city. The town authorities had even taken up the matter. He surely was *not* in Tregony.

Stephen Dane drew a long breath of relief. The place had been searched, then ! What had led him to destroy that sure evidence, that inanimate tongue whose wordless story would have been certain proof ? A strange awe fell upon him. What if God meant to save him ? For now he *must* believe in something higher and stronger than mere blind chance.

No one remarked his silence. He took his way

through the groups unnoticed. He was glad to have Adams still absent; for friendly eyes are often keen.

What of his father through all this long morning? He almost dreaded to enter the house.

An expression in Joe's face startled him. Those slow-moving brown eyes were quickened with a sense of fear or suspicion. He turned pale through all the grime and heat.

"Where have you been all the morning?" she asked, excitedly.

"To work."

"Why, they say Mr. Vennard is — that he has — no one can find him. Is it so, Stephen?"

Her voice sank to a terrified whisper.

"What's the matter?" he exclaimed, roughly, more to regain his own self-possession than to startle her.

"Can't a man go off if he likes? Where's father?"

"He's sick, and wouldn't eat any breakfast," Joe said, sulkily.

"What is it — fever? Does he talk?"

Stephen was washing his face and hands and wiping them on the coarse towel. Did this girl know or suspect? Had she penetrated the poor old man's secret?

"Mutters to himself — that's all. Guess he was pretty drunk last night."

Stephen winced, but went straight to the bedroom. His father moved uneasily, and drew the soiled counterpane over his head.

"You're sick, father." The tone was tender and reassuring.

"Yes, Stephen, sick," was the quavering reply.

"What can I do for you?"

"Nothin', Stephen, nothin'. I'm gettin' to be a feeble old man. Le' me lay here and rest."

All this time he had not once turned his eyes towards his son.

"I think rest will be the best medicine," was the decisive answer: "After a few days' quiet you will come around all right again;" and Stephen gave the withered hand a pressure that said so much. It comforted the poor soul suffering all the remorse and agony possible for such a nature. If Stephen suspected his secret, it was in safe keeping.

"Have you been to work, Stephen?" Joe asked, as he seated himself at the table.

"Yes. I went down there, and Bartow told me to go to work. Vennard hasn't been in all the morning. There's a precious row about him."

"And Mrs. Vennard is taking on like a crazy woman! Sally Fawcett says she'll bet anything that — that —"

"That what?" Stephen stirred his coffee impatiently.

"That he's been murdered!" Joe's tone dropped to a whisper, and she glanced around fearfully.

"Well," Stephen replied, slowly, "Vennard has made some bitter enemies; but a man must hate another

pretty fiercely to murder him in cold blood. Hard blows are sometimes given in a quarrel, but they can't prove that against any one. Slocum was the last man who saw him."

"They've been searching—haven't they? Down by the P'int?"

"Yes. They fancied he might have gone to view the new mill-site. And they are sending everywhere."

"What do you think of it, Stephen?"

Joe dared not raise her eyes from her plate.

"I don't want to think just now. It looks very mysterious; but Vennard was a close man, not much given to telling his plans. If he should come back this afternoon —"

"If he shouldn't—what then?"

"I should begin to suspect foul play. Saturday is an important day for him."

Stephen's tones were calm and measured. Somehow he began to distrust Joe, and thought it best to allay any vague suspicious.

"Stephen," the old man called as he rose. "What's come o' Mr. Vennard?" The eyes seemed starting out of their deep sockets.

"No one knows." Stephen cleared his throat, and told the story, the surmises, and the search.

"Didn't—they—find—nothin'?" Each word came with a gasp.

"Not a fragment. Not a trace."

"Wouldn't they hunt everywhere? Wouldn't they turn an' twist, an' drag an' scour? He's a great man, Stephen. Folks 'll do a sight for rich 'uns. And may be some one 'll be took up for his murder."

How the watery eyes glared on Stephen! The thin hand clutched his arm, and the gaunt figure partially raised itself.

Stephen laid him gently back on the pillow.

"You must not excite yourself so. It will be time enough to talk of that when they find the body. Will you promise to lie still here, and try to sleep? You're weak and tired. I'll come back early."

"Yes, I'll be still." He said it in a fearful whisper.

Stephen had one more errand. He went to his room, and peered into the chink of the chimney. There was the book. With his knife he slipped it out. It needed a secure hiding-place. For it might happen that the real agent in this terrible drama would escape scot free. God held them all in the hollow of His hand. He had a right to take every precaution.

He carried the book out with him. Loitering around with an observant eye, he discovered a broken place at the root of the woodbine. The old house was falling into ruin. He pushed in the book, and patched up the place with a stone, dragging the clustering vines over it.

When he was out of sight, Joe ran up to his chamber. The chink had been despoiled. What had Stephen

Dane to do with the disappearance of Thomas Vennard? She shivered with dread of the awful secret that had come into her possession. If Stephen — but no, she would not believe it.

It was a strange afternoon in Tregony — a strange day, indeed. A shudder pervaded the very atmosphere. Voices dropped together in a lower key, and eyes glanced into each other with vague questioning. Every man felt the subtle influence amid the din and smoke. As if the eye that had watched them so vigilantly would watch them no more. As if the solid, iron-like figure, peering here and there, haunting every place with a sort of ubiquity, would never ferret out any more delinquencies.

There were moments when Stephen Dane waited breathlessly for some one to accuse him. How strange that no one knew of his discharge — of the altercation between him and Mr. Vennard! No one asked where he had been the preceding afternoon. No one had missed him, perhaps. One of those odd circumstances in which there seems a peculiar fate — or shall we call it by its right name? — Providence!

The day ended at last. He found his father weaker, and evidently wandering in his mind. He could not help thinking death would be the best end for this tragedy. It would take the stain of one foul deed out of the world, and leave only a pitiful remembrance of the man he had called father. Father! Faugh! Did

any such sluggish and corrupt blood flow through his veins?

But if he died here without any assistance, such as he might justly claim, would Stephen be entirely guiltless? Would not wishing him out of the way, and raising no hand to keep the feeble flame alive, amount in another way to murder? Because he could see how much better it would be for the grave to close over this secret, he knew it was his duty to bide God's time. Did God have anything to do with such poor miserable souls?

He was tender as a woman, this great, brawny man. He went to the doctor's, and afterwards sat up far into the summer night, administering medicines and bathing the burning hands and face with cool spring water; smoothing back the straggling hair, and arranging the tumbled pillows. Now and then the quivering lips moved, or the vacant eyes gave a questioning stare; but the secret that lay between father and child was never touched upon. I think the old man accepted, in a sort of blind way, his safety, and was content to be taken into the keeping of his strong and patient son.

VI.

SAVED.

THE next day was Sunday. Stephen was intensely thankful. The quiet, the soft chiming of church bells, the long day with no surmises and excitements. Adams came in the afternoon, but ascribed Stephen's abstracted air to his night's watching and care for his father.

Archy Dane fell into a stupor. A sort of torpid life that was not conscious of any physical want, only an intense mental hungering after his son. That was told more by beseeching glances, than words. Even Joe became aware of a new bond between them.

She kept her own counsel. One mighty feeling swayed her—love for Stephen. She was weak, curious, and given to gossiping; but in this matter not all the tortures of the Inquisition could have extorted one surmise from her.

On Monday the world took up its old routine. Each day suspicion of murder became stronger. The woods

were searched anew, the river dragged at the Point. No success.

Five days afterwards some children went to the lower part of the town to gather huckleberries, that were just ripening. An area of several acres of timber had been cleared and burned over, and the bushes, with their usual tendency, had covered the spot. The river made a decided circuit here; the shore was shallow, and bordered by low-growing swamp cedars.

One adventurous youth sallied out to explore the place and gather some attractive wild flowers. Wading over the moss-grown stones, peering into shaded coves, and startling the little fishes from their repose, he at last came upon a sight that filled him with wildest terror. One shriek of dismay, and he rushed back to the group pale and breathless.

"A man," he exclaimed, when he could find his tongue. "A drowned man in the water, and his face all big and white!"

"You're crazy, Charley. Frightened by a stone," said one of the larger girls.

"I ain't, neither. 'Twan't no stone. I see his face and his hair."

"I don't believe it."

"Come and see for yourself," said the indignant hero.

But most of the group hung back, glancing at each other with great, frightened eyes. Presently some of

the more courageous ventured to follow Charley. He went along plucky enough until he neared the fatal spot; then he looked around to see if they were following.

"There!" His finger pointed through the trees.

A ghastly, upturned face, swollen to twice its natural size! No wonder screams of affright broke from those young lips, and that some should obey their first impulse of flight. Others gazed in white terror, as if fascinated.

When it came to them that this was Mr. Vennard's body, they hurried home with the tidings. An hour afterwards, the whole town was in wild excitement. There was a cut on the temple of such force that it had fractured the bone, and three discolored spots at the throat, as if marked by fingers in the death struggle. His watch and pocket-book were found upon his person. The motive had not been plunder.

A coroner's jury were summoned immediately. It was in session that day and the next, and returned a verdict of "wilful murder."

Stephen took home the news, to Joe's great gratification; for since her uncle's illness her daily allowance of gossip had been abridged. He had become used to his burden in some degree; so he was able to master his voice in telling the details.

"It seems robbery wasn't the object," he said, with

emphasis. "I'm sorry for any man who has ever had a quarrel with him."

A light came into the wan face of Archy Dane.

Stephen would fain have gone to his own room that night, but the wistful eyes followed him about. The old bleared look of intoxication had grown fainter during these few days.

"Don't go; don't leave me, Stephen;" and he stretched out his skeleton hand. There was a world of entreaty in the voice.

"I think you will sleep to-night."

"I can't stay here alone;" and he started up in vague terror. "If you could see — no, it ain't devils! But he'll drag me out with him. Save me, Stephen!"

The eyes dilated. The worn frame trembled with wild excitement. The very fingers shook as if with an ague.

"I'll stay. I thought you were better. But I see you cannot do without your clumsy nurse;" and Stephen tried to smile.

"You shall have part of my bed. Don't leave me, Stephen."

"There, be quiet. I'll sleep here, on the settle."

"Bolt the door. Do you think any one will come?" and the eyes glared like fire.

"Why, no. It's all right now. Drink this;" and he gave him a composing draught.

By morning he had sunk back into the old stupor.

It was best, and gave Stephen a feeling of greater safety.

Then came a new shock. Forbes had been arrested for the murder. Since his discharge from the Foundery, he had been fierce in his denunciations of Mr. Vennard, and more than once used threatening language. He had been among the first to suspect murder.

It is strange how circumstances can be twisted and tortured even with a semblance of truth. Stephen Dane had been summoned as a witness, and was there in his place. He had heard Forbes's triumphant assertion that he could prove an alibi; he knew him innocent; yet he felt, but for that, he must have been tempted to believe him guilty. I cannot describe to you the cruel anguish of his mind as he listened to the evidence. Forbes *must* be acquitted. If no other way —

His mind wandered from the jury and the witnesses. At home there was a poor feeble life, scarcely worth the saving; but some tie of blood strong upon him, some strange pity or fine sense of honor, bade him save it. The sacrifice was fearful. Youth, health, manhood's strength and ambition, revolted. *He* was innocent too. Much might be done with his own life; but this other, come to the muddy, vapid dregs, what was it worth? *Could* he do it? Every pulse mutinied. A disgraceful death, or a felon's miserable existence in some foul prison. O God! O God!

He reached up his hands. He wanted to take hold of something stronger than himself. In his overwhelming agony he prayed. At this crisis of his life there *must* be a God. He could not do without one.

"Stephen Dane!"

He arose like one dazed. He made a step forward, relieved to find his incompetency was more mental than physical. But he seemed to have no feet, no will to guide himself, no strength.

Somehow he found his place. How much was the "whole truth"?

"Did you see Forbes the day he was discharged?"

That recalled Stephen's wandering brain. With a strong effort he steadied his mind.

"Yes."

"Did he use threatening or abusive language?"

"He was angry. I did not stop to hear what he said;" and Stephen's breath came in slow gasps. His very brain wavered with the effort to distinguish between necessity and right, and the desire not to attract suspicion to himself.

"Do you know whether he had made any threats before?"

"I never heard him."

He was glad he could say this, though he knew Forbes had been one of the loud talkers at the tavern.

"You were in Bross's Mill the morning after the

disappearance. Forbes hinted that something had happened to Mr. Vennard — did he not?"

"He spoke of an accident, I think. We were all excited;" and Stephen's throat constricted at the remembrance.

"Was there not something suspicious in his conduct — an exultation at the idea of Mr. Vennard's death?"

It was a cruel thrust for the witness. Great drops of perspiration started to his forehead. He felt, too, that a keen eye was upon him.

"He might have expressed some gratification. It is very natural when a man has ground you to the last notch;" and Stephen turned at bay in a desperate fashion.

"What did he say?"

"I don't remember;" which was true enough. He had a confused general impression, but could not recall any distinct sentence. "I do not think he talked or acted like a guilty man;" and there was a sharp ring in Stephen's voice. Forbes, following him eagerly, gave an inward thanksgiving for this good turn. It seemed as if everything had gone so positively against him until now.

Several more irrelevant questions, and he returned to his seat.

Another witness, and in that brief while Stephen Dane lived ages. Then his resolve was taken. If they committed Forbes, he would tell them where they could find the memorandum-book, and declare the man

innocent. Further he need not say. Heaven knew that would be sufficient. If—and there had been many times when he had despised that feeble old man at home—if he had failed in duty (and God knew he had) he would make amends for all now. He gave himself up into God's hands. Honor, respect, and success were dear, but he relinquished them. Just as God willed, he prayed humbly.

What was it? He began to follow the testimony in a weak, uncertain way. Two men swore to being with Forbes all the afternoon; one of them walked home with him. After supper he went to the doctor's for some medicine, as his mother had a "poor turn." He brought it back himself, and remained at home after that.

Then came a rigorous cross-examination. The testimony of the witnesses could not be shaken. There was no weak spot or flaw in it. The jury retired. After the shuffling of feet had subsided, there was a dead, awful calm. Forbes glanced about with an unconcerned air. Dane knew it for innocence; but more than one pronounced it hardihood.

Turn it about in whatever light they might, there was *not* sufficient evidence to commit the prisoner. So they came in with a reluctant verdict of acquittal, which left the matter more of a mystery than ever.

During this period the Foundry was closed, and preparations made for the funeral. The men, having nothing to do, congregated in groups, discussing the

murder with great spirit, and offering many curious surmises. Forbes's acquittal had been received with cheers; yet I am not sure but more than one there present, would have taken a grim satisfaction in a different verdict. Human nature hates mysteries that baffle it continually. There is a sense of justice in every heart that can be appeased only when the perpetrator of so monstrous a crime is brought to light.

Stephen Dane walked slowly homeward, greatly relieved, it must be confessed, and yet sorely puzzled. Did he have any duty in this matter? Had the God in whom he trusted really interposed and saved him? For it might easily have happened that Forbes could not have been substantiated in his account of the time. He, as innocent, must have suffered.

From the very beginning Providence had, so to speak, interposed. If Archy Dane had kept the money and the papers, he would have blundered upon the secret somehow. If there had been any witness to *his* last conversation with Mr. Vennard, and the fact of his discharge, suspicion would certainly have directed itself towards him. If his father had been well during this time of wild excitement, *could* he have kept his fatal secret? And now, if the old man paid his life for this one that he had taken, the justice of Heaven would certainly be satisfied, if that on earth remained forever unappeased. What hard, knotty problems these were. He was not used to such perplexing brain-work! Right and wrong

began to have a strange significance for him. A man's duty was something broader and higher than he had thought it six months ago.

He walked wearily homeward. Life itself seemed a mockery. The discrepancy between the lofty impulses of the soul, — its tender longings, its hungry ambitions, and the mean, low circumstances by which it is surrounded; the discouragements that follow its highest efforts; the dreary visions that meet it when it is most in need of hope and strength. After all, were not those who settled in a lower groove, and remained there contentedly, the best and safest, and certainly the happiest?

Joe stood in the door. It was a scorching hot day, but Stephen wiped something more than perspiration from his brow.

"How did it go?"

"Forbes was acquitted."

"Of course. You never believed he had a hand in it, Stephen?"

"No." He dared not face the eyes watching him. With a sort of sickly, uneasy smile, he subjoined, "They've offered a thousand dollars reward for the murderer."

"I don't believe they'll find him."

"There will not be a stone left unturned, I can tell you. Every one who has ever made a threat will be watched and suspected."

"You haven't, Stephen?"

What *did* this girl know? Why, she was worse than the twelve jurymen.

"I shouldn't like to be held to a strict account for any chance word. There's been a good deal of hard talk, first and last; though I should come to a pretty tight pass in my life before I'd stain it with such a black deed. Old Mr. Ellicott's been taken with paralysis."

"It's dreadful;" and Joe shivered. "Mrs. Vennard's going on like a crazy woman. No one seems to care about the child; but I suppose she doesn't half understand it."

"No," said Stephen, briefly, going in to his father.

The weak, wandering eyes gave a faint sign of recognition. What had been passing over yonder he neither knew, nor cared to know. Stephen felt the pulse — a faint thread. For days he had taken only the slightest nourishment. At this rate the weak frame would soon be worn out. It was best so. And if he could never come to a sense of the awful deed he had committed — How far did God's mercy extend?

He took up the tattered fan, and commenced brushing away the flies. Joe, just outside the door, had been having a good cry; why she hardly knew. Now that she felt better, she came in, and, stirring among the ashes, began to kindle the fire. Eating was a stern demand of nature. But Joe's heart was going through a fierce struggle for Stephen. How much we suffer for one another!

Stephen fell into deep thought. After it was all over — his duty here — he meant to try the world; to dare a hard battle, and win something. This secret buried in the grave, there would be no phantom to haunt him, to dog his steps with that uneasy sense of danger. He would board Joe in some pleasant family, and feel free to use his time and his energy for himself. He was young and strong, used to work, willing to wait. In ten years he would still be a young man; but at thirty-three he meant to stand on some higher plane than this.

Joe, little dreaming how she had been discarded from the fortune Stephen was to carve out for himself, yearned over him in her passionate tenderness, and whispered to herself between her sighs, "It's all the same to me. If the whole world believed it against you, 'twouldn't alter my love."

A curious lull fell over Tregony. The murder, so daring and inexplicable, became shrouded in a sort of awe. Mr. Ellicott died; and a cousin of Mrs. Vennard came down to offer his condolence and assistance. Nothing could be done at present at the Foundery. So the whole town seemed idle, but wonderfully quiet. Men spoke in lower tones. There was no fierce denunciation of the one who had rendered himself so universally disliked by the lower class. All the women felt a grief and pity for Mrs. Vennard, doubly bereaved, but ended their regrets in a way true to human nature.

"'Tain't so hard for her as 'twould be for one o' us. She's plenty o' money. She won't know much about want."

Which was very just.

Stephen Dane remained at home, mostly. The town talk was to him a dagger thrust into a fresh wound. Adams dropped in frequently; but his conversation ran in a different channel.

"Dane," he said one evening, as they sat out on a large stone, smoking, "Dane, I've an idea that might be worked up to profit for both of us. What's the good of your spending all your life here in Tregony?"

"I don't mean to. I'd leave it to-morrow, if I could."

"There's no telling anything about the Foundry. I have a little money, and if you could raise as much, we might go to Philadelphia and commence business in a small way. I've some friends there that would be of service. I tried the experiment once before, but didn't succeed;" knocking the ashes out of his pipe, with a grim smile. "It was with a fellow who had a weakness for a fast horse; rather expensive, you see; and he just cleaned me all out. I think *we* might make it go. You're an honest man, Dane, in other matters beside money."

"How much capital?" was Dane's brief query.

"I have about a thousand dollars. It *would* be a small beginning, to be sure;" with a doubtful com-

pression of the lips ; "but we're both practical workmen. We shouldn't need any help for some time, and if we didn't earn quite wages in the beginning — we haven't either of us any expensive habits."

"No. I'd be willing to live on a crust and cold water."

"You're a plucky fellow. I like that in you. I tell you, Dane," — and he brought his fist forcibly down on his knee, — "you are just the kind of man that succeeds. When you get hold of an idea, there's no let up to your grip. A man needs just that patient, dogged sort of perseverance to accomplish anything. And I believe you can make Vennard's theory work. I've been studying over that cut-off of yours, and the steam-chest. There's a secret of success somewhere in it. We could try experiments on a small scale until pretty sure. I know some scientific men there, who would take a young beginner by the hand."

How plausible all this looked ! He had been wishing for some friend to give him a lift. This first step was so hard ! But the money — could he wring it out of these stones ?

Just there, at the root of the woodbine, lay five hundred dollars. No stir had been made about it ; perhaps, indeed, it had not been missed. He had racked his brains with vain projects to restore it unobserved. Mrs. Vennard had enough, surely. If he should borrow it for a few years ?

He drew his breath hard. The man seemed sorely beset on every side.

"If I could raise the money," he said, slowly.

"O, you can between this and the first of September. If you left Tregony, you'd sell the place, of course?"

"Yes."

"There doesn't seem much hope for your father, Dane?"

"No. And after that, I'd planned to go away."

"Five weeks." Adams's voice dropped into a musing tone. "The August dog-days 'll go hard with him. He's only a shadow now. Suppose I should go to Philadelphia, Dane, and look around a little."

"Well," was the slow reply. What if he was counting on contingencies that might never happen! What if Adams should return to find him in a prison cell! He could not forget, even for an hour, the terrible shadow that enveloped him. He put his fingers to his temple in a nervous way, as if afraid the other would hear its throbs.

"Yes, I think it would be a good plan. I never met a man I felt so like pulling with, as you, Dane. And now that you've outlived your socialist fever—" he gave a short laugh.

"Yes, God knows I've outlived that!" His voice was fierce and hard. "When a man comes face to face with destiny, he needs something stronger than idle delusions. And I'm willing to work my way out to

the light. There is one, I know. And help, too. Others may pin their faith to these maudlin beliefs and sentiments, but I never shall again. The world may be at loose ends, but each man has enough to do to attend to his own soul."

"And his own business."

"Yes."

Then they smoked in silence a while. The young moon was coming up over the black Foundery chimneys. A tremulous flutter of south wind stole softly around, deadening the intense heat of the day. Over the river at the west, there was still a faint pink tinge lingering in the evening sky. A breath of newly-mown hay, and the spice of the cedars was wafted up to them. The hedge was alive with chirping insects. A balmy, glowing summer night.

"I think I shall go to Philadelphia, then." He gave a furtive glance in-doors. It would have been heathenish to wish that poor old man out of the way; but he had a fancy the son would feel much freer. And herein he was right, though he did not mistrust the terrible reason that swayed Stephen Dane.

After Adams left Tregony, the days seemed interminable to Dane. He could not pray for the event that was to bring him liberty. It was in God's hands, and he had accepted His fiat. But it was so hard to wait!

Archy Dane grew neither better nor worse. He

seemed sinking into second childhood, and more than once mistook Joe for the wife who had been so many years dead. But his eyes continually followed Stephen about with a wistful, deprecating expression, and occasionally the bony hand clutched him with an urgent grasp, as if to implore an assurance of safety. So the time sped on. What *was* to be done? They were already in arrears at the grocery. He had found a few days' work, but a spirit of dulness brooded over Tregony. Want began to stare them in the face. He would be compelled to go away to keep them from starvation. Where did God mean to bring him by this thorny path? For, though faith was weak, there was a little glimmer of light, and he kept his eyes fixed steadily on it, like a man who, perishing with cold and weariness on some forlorn moor, looks at the far ray in a distant cottage window. He may die before he reaches it, but he goes on, nevertheless.

At last Stephen broke the ice with Joe. Some step must be taken.

"Go away!" she exclaimed, in dull amaze. "You wouldn't leave me alone with *him*, Stephen!" and she nodded towards the bedroom.

"What am I to do? We cannot starve."

Joe thought of five hundred dollars somewhere. If brought to bay desperately, might she not use her secret. For to stay here after Stephen was gone would be impossible. It would kill her.

"Sell the place," she said, "and take us with you. For, I tell you, I will not stay here."

There was a look of threatening defiance in her eye. It made Stephen shiver and turn pale.

"Stephen," the feeble voice called.

He answered the summons.

The shaky fingers reached out imploringly. "What did she say, Stephen — goin' away — sellin' the place? Is she gon'ter be married? Gals do. You'll keep by me, Stephen?" and his breath came in frightened gasps.

"There's nothing for me to do here, in Tregony. And we must have money." There he paused.

"Yes, sell t' place. And, Stephen, take me with you. There's an ugly black ghost down in the woods. I never told no one. I never told you. And in the river —"

The old frightened look was haunting his eyes. His jaw fell, and the wrinkles in his face deepened, as also the gray pallor.

"Hush, hush! that's childish talk. Would you like to go away?"

"Take me, Stephen, take me. Anywhere."

He gave a sort of spring to his son's arms. He fastened his own around Stephen's neck, and moaned piteously, —

"Take me with you — don't leave me, Stephen."

"If you would like to go—if we could sell the place—" and he laid him back on the bed.

"Yes, sell it. All the air is full," lowering his voice to a whisper, "full of little devils. I can't breathe for them. And it makes me sick—sick," with a shudder.

"I'll take you away to some quiet place, where you can be at peace. And I'll stay with you always—always." He said it over to reassure himself. And yet with a sickening sensation. What if it should be for years? He had counted so largely on freedom. The whole world seemed blurred and faded before his eyes.

An hour afterwards his father wanted to get up, and sit by the window. And then he begged Stephen to take him out. He wanted a breath of air. Feeble and tottering the steps were, and the hands grasped Stephen's brawny shoulders for support. But the eyes looked less wild.

Stephen thrust down the fiend of impatience that kept tugging at his heart. Since he had accepted God's time and God's way, he must abide by them. And if this burden should be his for years to come—

Do not condemn him. There are times, in the lives of all, when we think we can see farther than God, and are wiser. Archy Dane's life seemed of such little value; besides, there was a sort of stern justice in his death. And Stephen would be so relieved by it! No matter how he prospered; one inadvertent word might

bring him down to disgrace and degradation in a moment. For now that he had concealed the crime, he had in some degree become accessory. The flames were hedging him in on every side.

It might have been the thought of going away that roused Archy Dane to a new sense of life. Certainly he began to improve. His mind was vague and wandering, sinking into a sort of imbecility; but he gained physical strength, and with his son's assistance walked a little every day. It was evident he would live. Any talk of selling out roused him in a moment. He was earnest to be away; if that restless vagueness deserved so strong a name. Stephen offered the place immediately.

Neighbor Fawcett came up to talk it over. The land joined his, and he would like to have it; but the old house was no object. They halted at the price.

Adams found affairs in this state when he returned. He was surprised at the amendment in Mr. Dane, though the tottering step and trembling limbs did not give promise of much strength. He was very enthusiastic about his new arrangements. He had hired a shop to his liking, and been to look at some second-hand machinery.

"Two thousand seems like stocking a baby-house, instead of such a place," he said, gravely. "I have some good friends, it is true, and one order to begin

with ; and we shall be able to increase. It oughtn't be less than five thousand."

A fluttering seized Stephen Dane's heart. What if he should risk this five hundred that he intended to borrow only, and lose it ! He would be a thief. It was an ugly word.

"Perhaps we had better not try it. It is a miserably small capital ;" and his hands twitched nervously at his beard.

"No, Dane, don't back out. We'll fight it through some way. If you could only be free ! A man can live so much more cheaply by himself. I've often wondered why poor men were crazy to encumber themselves with a wife and lots of children."

"But I can't be free." Dane's voice was hoarse and tremulous, and his whole frame shook as if with ague.

"We'll make the best of it. No use meeting difficulties half way."

There was some sturdy philosophy in this. Yet every nerve in Stephen Dane's body felt sore and strained ; his brain had been rasped to that point of irritability when one more touch verges on distraction. And yet he went through with his duties calmly ; he was tenderly patient with his poor old father, and so kind to Joe that it made her heart ache with a nameless pain.

At last Fawcett bought the place. Six hundred was the utmost he could be induced to give. The furniture, of but little value, was disposed of speedily to one and

another. The few remaining effects were packed, and preparations made for their journey. Adams had gone back already.

And so Stephen Dane left the old life behind. With fear and trembling. The world looked so wide, and, in spite of ambition, dreary. It was one thing to dream of success here, and another to dare it. If he should fail !

Out of the anguish of his heart he cried to God. Out of the bitter depths, out of the darkness and the desert. Was there any one to pity and to save?

VII.

THE NEW DAWN.

THREE years had passed since Stephen Dane left Tregony. Years of toil and patience, years of endurance, and sometimes, almost unknown to himself, years of hope. The actual struggle was so different from the half-defined ideas that had haunted him at the forge in Tregony, or looking over that calm, wonderful river. When he came to Philadelphia he had very little besides the thousand dollars he had placed in Adams's hands. Three rooms had been taken in an obscure street near the shop. What if they were uncarpeted? Stephen Dane had no weak longing after luxuries; besides, he had been used to privations all his life. And Joe was a most comfortable housekeeper in this respect; she did not grumble at any want. She missed her old gossips with Sally Fawcett sorely; but the strange place, — for she had never been out of Tregony, — the shop windows, gayly arranged, the long market with its endless variety, were unfailing sources of interest. When she could find her way about without difficulty, all her

spare moments were spent in the street, and the excitement kept her in excellent spirits.

Archy Dane, feeble and maundering, followed his son from house to shop, and back again, with the jealous tenacity of a dog. When Stephen was out of his sight, he was restless and dissatisfied ; but he would sit for hours watching him, in perfect content. He seemed to have lost much of his memory. Indeed, that one terrible transaction appeared to have faded from his mind completely. The only reminder of it was in his intense dislike of rivers. Shortly after their arrival, Stephen had taken him and Joe up the Schuylkill for a pleasant sail. The old, frightened look had come into Archy Dane's eyes, the quiver to his limbs, and he had begged piteously to be taken back, seeming to apprehend some imminent danger to them all. So great were his sufferings that Stephen resolved never to repeat the trip with him. But it appeared as if he might go on in this mere physical existence for years.

When Stephen Dane first determined to use the money that had so strangely fallen into his hands, it was not without a severe struggle and many misgivings. If it had been possible to restore it unquestioned, or without arousing suspicion, he would have done so at first. Since this had not been, the temptation of using it had proved too strong. Yet he had not blinded himself by any sophisms. He had grown too clear-sighted of late to be led astray by them. This money was not

his, but to be held in a sort of sacred trust until such a time as he might be able to restore it without any evil consequences. This time had come after leaving Tregony. He could mail it in any city, with the simple explanation of it being a debt due the estate, and be sure of secrecy. But it seemed as if here was an opening that might never occur in his life again. He would borrow the money, faithfully repaying principal and interest at the very earliest opportunity.

The excitement concerning the murder was still strong when he left Tregony. It seemed impossible that so daring and flagrant a crime could have been committed, and no trace be left of the perpetrators. The reward had stimulated every one to renewed effort, but still without the slightest success. As time wore on, and the mystery remained unsolved, interest was gradually transferred from the dead to the living.

Mr. Forsyth, a connection of Mrs. Vennard, was appointed one of the executors, and, conjointly with herself, little Hope's guardian. Seven months after her husband's death Mrs. Vennard had given birth to a little boy, who wailed out a short period of sickly babyhood, and died. After this the business proceeded to a slow settlement. The Foundry was opened under new auspices, the grand house sold in its unfinished state. In little more than a year Mrs. Vennard had become Mrs. Forsyth.

Stephen Dane smiled contemptuously when he heard

this. Poor little Hope, how would she fare? He resolved then that this money in his possession should be held in trust for Hope. At some distant day he would restore it to her.

There were many hard struggles during the first year, on their limited capital. They were both energetic and persevering, and found good friends. The second year they began to breathe more freely, and go back to the old enthusiasm concerning their experiment. All their spare hours were spent upon the model. New theories took the place of old ones. It became to both an object of more than interest—strange, wonderful love. Disappointment endeared it only the more. And as it approached completion, as it worked more and more satisfactorily, their enthusiasm grew into reverence.

Yet all of Stephen Dane's life did not go into this. As soon as circumstances warranted, he had changed to a more comfortable abode, something he could beautify with flowers and sunshine. They had a "best room," with a bright carpet on the floor, and a few cheap pictures that he had found at an old second-hand stall, of much more value than their price indicated. One, a warm, changeful thing, with tints of sunset glow, bits of silvery water, and a shallow, pebbly lake-shore, the tiny stones washed to whiteness by the slow motion of the current. Some books on a shelf—though these were mostly of a scientific nature; an easy chair, cushioned with crimson worsted damask, where his father

could sit and doze. The old man had changed somewhat. He would always be thin, angular, and shaky, but his clothes were clean and whole, his hair and beard neatly trimmed. They were snow-white now.

Joe had improved, too. She no longer went about slip-shod, with torn dresses and disordered hair. Stephen had insisted upon a dress-maker taking her in hand; and it was astonishing to see how her whole figure had changed. Her hair, the only beauty she possessed, — for it was long, soft, and fine, and of a shadowy, purple-black tint, — was trained into a luxuriant coil at the back of her head, with no stray, untidy ends. Her collar was always fresh and white, fastened with a knot of ribbon. Stephen kept her well supplied. It seemed as if he had inherited all these delicate, womanly attributes, a quick eye and refined taste, a certain sense of harmony and propriety. Joe lacked them entirely. She had so little perception or tact. She did these things, not from any love of being pretty, but simply because they pleased Stephen. If living in some wretched hut without them would have won his love, she would have been satisfied all the same. Apart from him, beauty or order was of but little consequence to her.

She studied somewhat, too. Hard work it was. She had an innate dislike to books. She puzzled her brains over them until her whole body revolted. She left off her provincialisms, she no longer clipped her words in

ignorant economy, and yet she was far from any received standard of intellectuality. A shadow of the old life would always hang about her. Was it some inherent birth-mark? It was true she had come of generations of sloth, thriftlessness, and dissipation. Who shall answer for it? Who has deprived these weak, uncertain souls of the sure stay and support — the birthright God meant them to have?

There was but one strong passion in the nature of Josephine Dane — her love for Stephen. A more vigorous minded girl might have found a mate beyond the precincts of her home, but with Joe, association was a great deal. Her soul seemed to be purely mechanical. Put it in any common groove, and it would soon become accustomed to the routine, and ask no other. It would never torment you by sending out troublesome shoots, by forcing a passage up into the light and air, or demanding finer nourishment than it found in its narrow sphere. She had loved him, not for any strong or striking characteristic, but simply because he came in her way. Her highest ideal of life had been Sally Fawcett. A jolly, not-over neat matron, laughing and scolding in a breath; taking life easy if the house did remain unswept, and the children tumbling about in rags. She had fancied herself falling into something like this. What if Stephen did go to the tavern and come home a little merry? His kisses even then would be sweeter than clean, orderly silence and abstinence.

And if children hung about her knees or tangled their sticky hands in her unkempt hair, — what matter, so long as they were his !

But this day-dream was going through a slow, cruel process of disillusion. That careless, rollicking existence would never be hers. She was lifted up to a new sphere — one less congenial. Thought, or any kind of brain work, was hard labor to her. She would rather stand over the steaming washing-tub all day. Stephen went up to new heights easily and naturally, and to be a little nearer him, she followed reluctantly.

And yet she seemed to understand that the gulf between them was widening, had been ever since the advent of Adams and the books. She was not so happy for it — he happier. This was what she could not account for, and she held against them a sort of jealous grudge. As if Stephen had no right to outstrip her !

Stephen, being a man, and much occupied with his labor and his plans, studied Joe very superficially. So long as she was comfortable and made no complaints, so long as her calico dresses were neat and trim, the cherry-colored ribbon at her throat fresh, and her bonnet not too showy in its floral adornments, he was satisfied. To have her read a whole page, or a newspaper column, without stumbling or miscalling words, and write a neat order for the grocer, were achievements in his eyes. He praised her for them. And the smiles, the kind words, gave her hope when hope was

almost dead. It never occurred to her that it might not be as easy for Stephen to love her, as it was for her to love him.

At last the most eventful day of Stephen Dane's life drew nigh. The model had been removed to the shop of a friend, a man well known in business circles, and who had been very kind to these young beginners, so stubbornly contesting Dame Fortune. A number of scientific men and practical machinists had been invited to the trial.

"If you want to go up, Adams," Dane said in an unsteady voice, "go on. I'd rather stay here. Somehow it seems like trying a critical surgical operation on a beloved child. You don't know whether it will fail or succeed. And I believe I'm a coward. If I should have to take the poor mangled remains back into my arms, I should break down into womanish tears."

"Don't talk so, Dane; you make me nervous. It can't fail. McKinstry said so, and his word is as good as any of them. He offered to buy us both out this morning. Yes, I'd like to go, and you must too, Dane. Let's shut up shop, and take a holiday. We've earned it."

"No, no; I couldn't stand it. I'm in earnest, Adams. To come so near, and fail!"

"Tut, man! Who thinks of failure?"

"Go on then."

"And come back a successful man on the high road to fortune. Is that what you mean?"

Stephen gave a faint and sickly smile. His whole system was unnerved. He had known nothing like this since those fearful days at Tregony, when life itself hung on a thread — a word.

The two workmen, stolid and grimy, went on with their usual indifference. They had nothing at stake. Stephen glanced furtively at his father. Sitting opposite there, before a bench his son had rigged up to please him, straightening little bars of iron, trying them in the vice, riveting them together, smiling in his unmeaning way, or talking to himself. It gratified him so to be employed. He had a fancy he did his son good service, and Stephen encouraged these harmless vagaries. He even took a strange comfort in the poor, worn life. It had grown so near to him that it almost seemed something of his own. There was no point of duty in which he failed now. He humbly repented those rebellious thoughts when he first learned that God meant he should take up this heavy cross. Daily wearing had made it light. And so we sometimes find a sweet and strengthening grace in our bitterest trials.

At noon he locked the shop and walked home, with his father trudging by his side. The people he met in the street no longer wondered at his tender care. An old woman who kept a stand on the corner always gave them a bright smile. "Such a good son!" and a sigh,

that was more of commendation than grief, would usurp the smile.

"Well?" Joe exclaimed. It was her usual style of questioning.

"We have not heard yet." And then Stephen ate his dinner in silence. Joe had grown used to his grave ways.

Back again. There was so much routine to life. You did the same things over and over every day.

Adams ran in once, his face full of the wildest enthusiasm.

"Tell you what, Dane, they're putting her through h-a-r-d," with a lingering emphasis. "And she's just splendid! They can't find a flaw in her if they work from now until Christmas. No fear of her coming back with amputated limbs. Our child, Dane!"

A warmth and glow of fatherhood overspreading him, permeating every fibre of his body. He was at the very summit of happiness. It was wife, child, and all to him.

Then the bells rang for six. A pleasant summer day it was. Stephen loitered about the shop. All day he had lived in a dream, hardly daring to think. By this time—

"Dane, old fellow! we're rich men, both of us;" and Adams's hand came down vigorously on the other's shoulder. "McKinstry and Disbrow want you, straight. Why, we've half revolutionized the world of steam.

One more discovery and we shall go up to the top of the ladder. How grave you are! Don't you believe it? Why, I threw up my old hat — Silas Adams — forty and odd years old!"

I think some tears came into Stephen Dane's deep and shady eyes. Three years ago he had been in Thomas Vennard's Foundry, studying on this question in his vague, ignorant way. Three years to-morrow since — ah, no wonder he shivered!

"Why, man alive, what ails you?"

Stephen roused himself.

"Come, they're waiting."

He glanced at his father. "I must take him home first."

"Nonsense! Bring him along. We'll find a quiet corner to put him" — impatiently.

"No; let me take him home. I shall feel better."

"But think, Dane! It's late, and they're all waiting. I said I'd have you back in a twinkling. Come."

He took the old man by the arm almost roughly. The frightened eyes turned imploringly to Stephen, who was locking the door.

He soon released his father from the vehement grasp, and the three went on silently together.

"One would think Dane had some terrible secret on his mind," mused Adams, a little crossly, to himself, never dreaming how near he came to the truth.

But Stephen Dane brightened up amid the hearty

congratulations of the group of which he had at once become the centre. For Adams had been generous. There was no meanness about the man.

"We both worked on it, and did our best; but I do believe the main idea that clinched the thing was Dane's. He's long-headed. The world will hear something else of him if I'm not mistaken," Adams had said, warmly.

It encouraged Stephen Dane to find himself so much at home with these educated men. By slow degrees he was coming up to his true place. A sort of informal talk this was; but they all became better friends, and adjourned for business the next morning. It was really true. Fortune and fame were within his grasp. Why, three years ago he had thought himself the most miserable and accursed man on God's earth!

"Take me home, Stephen," said a faltering, broken voice at his side; and, turning, he beheld his father, the dull gray of his face deathly white, and his eyes fixed in a frightened stare.

"I seen *him*, Stephen, a standin' over there. Don't let him take me! Did he get up out o' the river?"

He put his strong arm around his father. He drew the shaking head down on his shoulder so that the unthinking lips might be stopped.

"Is he ill?" some one asked.

"He is weak and wandering. I must take him home. I am the only child he ever had, and he

clings to me. Poor father! I am here. Do not be afraid."

Something in Stephen Dane's mien and tones filled them all with involuntary respect and admiration. McKinstry thought of his three sturdy boys growing up, and wondered if one of them would treat his white hairs with such filial tenderness.

"Out o' the river, Stephen. All white, and dreadful!"

Stephen Dane drew a long breath of dismay. Adams stood looking on. What if, at this height, he was to be hurled back into degradation! He turned blindly. He lifted the trembling, cowering figure, shaking as if an ague fit had seized him.

"My carriage is there in the yard," said Disbrow. "I insist upon your taking it, Dane. Here, let me call my man."

Stephen carried him out, stopping the betraying mouth with kisses. He had never offered such a caress before, but he was in a great bound of agony now. The lips were soft as a child's, the breath no longer polluted with rum and tobacco.

At last they were safe. The carriage door closed with a sharp click. The driver there on the front seat would never translate this pitiful moan —

"Out o' the river, Stephen!"

He carried his father through the room, and laid him on the bed, making a brief explanation to Joe. Then

he administered a composing draught, and watched until drowsiness intervened. Archy Dane still twitched and quivered with some strong nervous shock. The eyes were but half closed, the white frightfully visible in contrast with his sunken, withered cheeks.

"Is he going to be sick?" Joe asked, in a low tone, as Stephen sat down to the supper table.

"I don't know. Something frightened him, I think."

"He looks dreadfully — as if he might die. I've never seen anybody die, Stephen;" and Joe shivered.

"Don't think of it now."

Stephen was glad that Joe slept up stairs. For all night his father gave fitful starts, and cried out with dim remembrances of the fatal deed that was bearing heavily upon him again. The son watched him, and thought, wildly and agonizingly enough at times. All day a sort of chill presentiment had hung over him. Perhaps because it was nearing this fatal season.

He had hoped that memory would never return to his father. If life could go out quietly — may be there was some mercy with God, that man knew not of. He could see the weakness, the temptation, the unguarded moment; and He was pity, as well as justice.

The long night wore away; for long it seemed, although at midsummer. The stars softened and died out; there were faint opal streaks coming up in the east, and a quiver of soft gray light. He extinguished the

lamp and opened the blinds. A fragrant breath from distant river and meadow-land fluttered into the great city with dawn. How calm and peaceful the far-off heavens were! God was so strong, so restful! And Stephen Dane prayed — not this time to have his burden removed, but for grace to bear it. God was wiser than he, leading him through paths he had not known.

"Stephen!" How unnaturally clear the tone was!

He went back to the bed-side.

"Is it night?"

"No, morning. The sun is just rising."

"If I could see it!"

Stephen raised him, and turned his face towards the window. The dull eyes rolled vacantly.

"It's all dark. Don't leave me, Stephen."

The old, old pleading. A strange awe fell over him.

"Stephen, am I sick? Call your mother, boy."

"Dear father, she is dead. Years and years ago, you know."

"Dead!" He caught fiercely at the word, grasping Stephen's arm. "Yes, *he's* dead. You needn't tell me. What do you know? Did he get up out o' the river, and tell you?"

"No, no; be quiet."

"Stephen, what come o' Mr. Vennard?"

Should he tell the truth? He was in an agony of doubt.

"Stephen," — the voice was low and awesome, and made the blood curdle in his veins, — "Stephen, I murdered him! I didn't mean to do it. I see him a countin' his money. He had so much, and we was so poor! He hadn't any business with such a lot, while other folks hadn't none. I thought I'd just knock him over, an' make off afore he could get up. So I hit him with my fist one side o' his head, for I crep' up softly behind him. He keeled over like a log, an' never stirred. I took the money an' went off, an' when I looked back, and see him layin' so still and white, I was scared. I went to him an' ris him up. There was a great gash t'other side of his head, where he'd hit agin' a stone. I wet my han'kercher and tried to bring him to. But it wan't no use. He was dead. O, Stephen!"

Stephen Dane neither moved nor spoke. His lips were dry. His heart almost stood still.

"I 'gin an awful scream. I couldn't help it. If the money would a' brought him back, he might a' had it for all me. I didn't know what to do, I was so frightened. I dragged him to the river, and tumbled him in. And he's come up agin', Stephen. Take me away where he'll never find me."

"Can you listen to me, father?" Stephen's voice was strong and distinct.

"You'll keep me safe! You won't let him have me?" with quivering terror in the faintest gesture.

"Yes, safe. Now listen." And then Stephen went briefly and clearly over the particulars of that terrible event, — the inquest, Forbes's arrest and acquittal, their removal from Tregony, — and assured him again and again of his safety.

"Seems as if I'd been in a dream. So, they buried him, put him in the ground. He can't get up. But I didn't mean to, Stephen, God knows. And if I could a' given my life for his'n, to bring him back — What'll God say?"

O, it was coming near. That fateful question — what could he answer!

"I never touched the money. I lost it somewhere — I forget. And I didn't mean to kill him. Tell it to God, Stephen. You've been a good boy, an' He'll hear you. Tell him how sorry I was — It's so dark. Where is *He*, Stephen?"

In his agony of tender love, Stephen prayed — that God would forgive this poor soul as he forgave the thief upon the cross. That out of his infinite pity and boundless love, he would pardon the deed that had no malice in it or murderous intention. That he would wash the guilty soul in his own precious blood, shed for all sinners.

"Stephen!" the clutch was deathly in its intensity — "did *He* hear you? Mother taught me a prayer long ago — I forget — I can't see you — get a light, Stephen! Kiss me. She used to."

He bent down in reverence. The lips were cold.

"I can't remember —. Hold me by the hand. Is it very far, Stephen? I didn't mean to do it. God forgive me! I — didn't — mean —"

The thin fingers relaxed their grasp. The jaw fell. There was a spasmodic convulsion, and all was still.

Stephen Dane knelt by the bed-side and prayed. Joe found him there when she came down, and she knew by the first glimpse of his face that her uncle was dead.

Of the men whom Stephen had met during the last year, Mr. McKinstry respected his grief the most. The little scene he had witnessed had touched him to the heart. He offered a pretty plot in Laurel Hill for the interment, and showed his sympathy in many delicate ways. That Stephen should be so prostrated by grief, scarcely surprised him.

And yet I cannot say that Stephen sorrowed regretfully, if deeply. He missed his father daily, hourly. He had been such a constant charge, such a child in all things, that the feeling of loneliness was very great. He hardly knew, until now, how much he had loved him.

But it also brought a sense of relief and freedom. He could scarcely believe the shadowy dread had fallen off, that he was no longer walking on deceitful ground, where an earthquake might yawn at any moment. That awful secret was safe forevermore.

And it was comforting to know that, although his father's hand was stained with crime, it was not so utterly foul and black. He had not intended murder. At that fatal moment he would have given his own life. Perhaps God remembered that in the country whither he had gone.

To Stephen there came a great change after this. Holding their patent in their own hands, both he and Adams derived from it a considerable income. The little shop was given up. Adams received a very advantageous offer from New York, and he would fain have persuaded Stephen to join him; but McKinstry, at the head of a flourishing business himself, induced the young man to remain. Besides, he was attached to the place. Some strange, yearning affection held him near the spot where his father was sleeping peacefully; the poor, weak, troublous soul forever at rest.

And now Stephen Dane had arrived at that point of success where everything turns into gold. He bought a pretty cottage, and furnished it to his liking, installing Joe as mistress, though she longed for another and dearer title. To her he was utterly incomprehensible. She felt afraid of him in a most peculiar manner, and yet her love grew to be the mastering thought of her existence.

The first money that Stephen felt he could call his, he invested, principal and interest, for Hope Venard. The debt had always been sacred to him. He

had heard that Mrs. Forsyth, shortly after her marriage, had gone to Europe. Adams had incidentally spoken of their return to New York, and the rumor that Mr. Forsyth had dissipated the greater part of his wife's fortune. A wild desire to see the little girl haunted Stephen. Fate had in some sense made him her protector, if she needed one. And so, five years after that terrible summer, with a new life opening before him, he resolved to find Hope Vennard, and henceforth keep watch over her.

VIII.

H O P E .

SILAS ADAMS, in his prosperity, had taken to himself a wife. Heretofore he had professed to hold matrimony somewhat in contempt. Perhaps his being well able to afford such a luxury now softened his views. And he had chosen, as men of that age often do, a little, sunny-haired, eager, impulsive being, who would never outgrow her childhood, and whose strongest charm lay in her ardent love for her husband. She amused and interested Stephen Dane from the fact of her being so unlike any woman he had ever met before.

Adams had insisted upon his being domesticated with them during his stay in New York. No two women ever had more talking to do. Tregony, the old life together in Philadelphia, their success, and the many improvements since. Then there was so much to see in the city. At times Stephen felt confused and wearied with the never-ending variety.

He had learned, without any questions, all that Adams knew of Mrs. Vennard, now Mrs. Forsyth.

Mr. Forsyth had proved a dissipated spendthrift. He had wasted nearly all his wife's property.

"It's a shame," Adams said. "So much as she must have had from her father! But, Dane, I sometimes think how Vennard worked, and ground his men to the lowest cbb, all for what? That some one else might fool away the money. I'd like to know how the little girl fared between them. I thought I would hunt them up, just out of curiosity; but I lost track, and haven't found the time, or the interest either, for that matter. One cannot look after everybody."

With Stephen it was a sacred duty. Through his father's agency Hope had been deprived of her natural protector; and now, if she was in any need, he must surely supply the place. He said nothing of his intentions to Adams, however; it was too sore a subject with him for discussion. But in his daily walks, by the aid of a directory, he managed to find most of the Forsyths in the city. Of several he made inquiries. Once, indeed, he fancied he had gained a clew. But this Forsyth had disappeared with a second-rate actress, and of the wife he could find no trace.

His stay drew to a close. Already it had exceeded his first limit. And yet he hated to leave the place without having made the slightest discovery. One hope was still left him: from the Ellicotts in Philadelphia, distant connections, he might learn something of Mrs. Forsyth.

One warm October afternoon he had been rambling through the precincts east of City Hall, haunting old second-hand bookstalls, and discovering one or two curious pictures, of some far-back date. He hardly knew how the time had gone, until he saw throngs of men and boys hurrying homeward. Not caring to be jostled about by the crowd, he turned into a by-street and pursued his way leisurely.

It became evident, ere long, that he had taken the wrong direction, for here he was coming out to the river. A damp, dirty smell pervaded the air, and groups of sharp-eyed, half-dressed children beset him. Sturdy little beggars, with their whining plea of, "Only one penny;" or, if he listened, a more extended story of the sick mother or father, or household of helpless children. Many of them little girls, too. What if this should ever be Hope's fate? Why did he think of it? Surely it could not come to that!

She was twelve now. Quite a large girl, perhaps. And yet he could never see her as otherwise than the little child he had held in his arms. Her soft, beautiful hair, her pleading eyes, her sweet voice, — how they all haunted him! And that indefinable grace about her, that suggestion of fragrance: to think of her in connection with these wretches!

He wandered on, seeming to face the river at every other turn. Gray evening had begun to fall. No tender sunset tints to penetrate these close, narrow streets.

Harsh, discordant voices, shrill laughs that jarred upon his soul. A homesick longing stole over his heart. What was this? Rutgers Street—cleaner and more quiet. He wanted to go towards the north, somewhere; so he stood thinking.

"If you please, sir—" said a soft, hesitating voice at his side.

He turned, but could not see her face: it was hidden by her hat.

"Mother is sick, and we haven't anything to eat."

The old story. He had not given to the noisy beggars down yonder; so he drew some bits of change from his pocket, and thrust them in her hand.

"Thank you;" and she was gone. He walked on to the corner, and then paused. A man was lighting the street lamp; should he ask him the direction?

"Sir!"

He glanced around. The same little girl—he could have told her voice. And now he remarked the straggling golden curls.

"You gave me a gold piece. I thought may be it was a mistake, and ran back as fast as I could. There was a good deal besides."

He caught the child and drew her towards the lamp. He pushed back her hat, and scanned her face eagerly. Thin and pale, with a pinched, forlorn look, and yet a certain air of native refinement.

"What is your name?"

"O, please, sir, let me go. I never begged before. But there was nothing in the house, and mother was so hungry! I didn't mind for myself."

She was crying now, partly with fright, and partly because the grasp on her arm really hurt her.

"Tell me your name!" He did not know how excited his own voice was. For somehow this little face touched him strangely.

"Hope Forsyth."

"Hope Vennard, you mean." He must always have her by that old name. He hated the *Forsyth*. It had worked her cruel wrong if it had reduced her to this.

She looked at him with wild, startled eyes.

"Where do you live? Where is your mother?"

"Just down here."

"Take me there."

He placed his arm around her gently enough now. But he wanted to clasp her to his heart. Little Hope Vennard given back to him, to him alone!

They turned up a narrow court. He knew it was filthy, because he stepped into a pool of slimy water.

She paused at the door. "It's up stairs. If you'll wait until I get a light."

The same clear, delicate intonation that had struck him so oddly in the child.

"Never mind. I can find my way." But he held her tightly by the hand.

Up two flights of stairs. Here, a smell of salt fish; there, beefsteak and onions. A crying baby; a woman scolding; a man singing in a drunken, maudlin fashion. But on this floor it was quieter.

She went in and lighted a candle. By the dim yellow ray he surveyed the room. Not positively barren, but feeling chill, and looking uncomfortable.

"A gentleman, mamma. He gave me some money."

There was an unconscious grace in this simple introduction.

"Raise me up, Hope. I never sent the child out to beg before. We've been used to plenty all our lives, until now; I never thought to die here like a dog!"

The voice was weak and fretful, breaking down into a cough. She was frightfully emaciated, the eyes sunken, the lips livid, the hands skeleton-like, and trembling.

"I came to see if I could be of any assistance to you," Stephen Dane said, when he had recovered a little from his surprise.

"I never thought to ask it from any one. We had plenty — didn't we Hope? — until that villain —"

"Hush, dear; it makes you cough."

"You want a fire," Stephen began. "These autumn nights are chilly. Are there any stores near by?"

"Yes. I had better go," and Hope laid her mother down. "I shall find them sooner. I won't be gone but a moment."

Stephen put the gold piece in her hand again. "Get everything you can think of," he said.

"I'm sure you're very kind, sir. But it's hard to have to come to charity, when one has had every luxury of one's own. My father was very rich. So was my first husband. Hope was his child, but I'm sure I've been a mother to her. Only if I hadn't let *him* get hold of her money. He was a false, black-hearted villain."

"Don't talk." She was coughing fearfully now, and Stephen noticed that the handkerchief she held to her mouth was saturated with blood.

"Yes. I want to tell you. I married again—a second cousin of my own. He was Hope's guardian. I thought he loved me so. But he only wanted the money. And when that was gone, he went off with an actress, a shameless hussy! and left us here to starve. I've been ailing a long while. As much a broken heart, as anything."

Her tone was querulous and bitter. Stephen Dane had never been prepossessed in her favor when she was Miss Ellicott. Going back to those crude perceptions, he had the key to the woman's whole character. Weak, vain, and self-indulgent, with no real strength or fortitude, no faculty of governing circumstances.

"How long since your husband went away?" he asked presently.

"In July. He took about a thousand dollars. It

was Hope's money. I didn't mean that he should have it, but he threatened to kill us both. He was so infatuated with that woman! And he took my diamonds! I sold my jewelry and my dresses by degrees. We were forced to come here at last; and now all is gone. There was nothing more to sell. I hoped I should die before it came to this. Poor Hope! She never begged before!"

The child entered at this moment, her little arms full. She built a fire upon the hearth; snuffed the candle — and Stephen noticed in a vague way how the tallow had made a little roll at one side. A winding-sheet, superstitious Joe would have said. Well, one would soon be needed.

"Can't I help you?" said Stephen, coming up to Hope in an awkward way.

"Get me something to eat, Hope," exclaimed the invalid, impatiently. "It's a hard thing to starve."

Stephen had looked after his father so long that he was at home in this department. When they had made some broth and administered it to Mrs. Forsyth, he remarked that Hope had purchased but sparingly. So he took up his hat.

"Are you going?" and Hope's voice was full of vague sadness.

"Only to buy some more food, and see a physician. I will come back soon."

Hope held the candle at the stairway. Once he glanced back at those entreating eyes. His little Hope ! The more his because she was so friendless and forlorn.

He returned laden with delicacies, and accompanied by a physician. The famished woman, in that extreme hunger which sometimes precedes consumptive dissolution, was begging eagerly for something to eat.

"Let her have anything that she wants," said the doctor. "Her pulse is very low. She cannot last but a little while."

"How long?"

"Two or three days at the utmost. She may drop off at any moment. This mixture will alleviate her cough — that is all I can do."

Hope and Stephen were left alone with the dying woman, though to both she looked much improved. Her voice grew stronger, and she *would* talk. She seemed to revel in that old time of luxury and ease. Her weak mind, even at the last, could not endure that this stranger should remain in ignorance of her true station. Of Mr. Forsyth she spoke with all the bitterness her feeble nature could command. And yet it was evident his sway over her had been complete. A hard master and a tyrant he had proved, a cruel, sensual man.

"I couldn't help his getting Hope's money," she said, in her weak, pitiful defence. "He was her guardian.

I tried to do my best. I have been good to you, Hope — haven't I?"

"Yes," said Hope, kissing the fevered brow with her cool lips. Which meant she had not beaten or otherwise maltreated her. But, for all motherly tenderness or sympathy, the child might as well have been utterly friendless.

"I'm sure I meant it all for the best," in a whining tone. "I don't know what the poor child will do when I'm gone. Her father had some friends somewhere — I've forgotten."

"She shall be cared for." He turned the child around so that she faced him. "Will you trust me, Hope?" he asked.

She looked at him questioningly. He was glad there was nothing about her to remind him of her father.

"Will you?" His voice trembled with emotion.

"Yes." She placed one hand in his.

Mrs. Forsyth's mind began to wander a little. But it was her second husband that troubled her thoughts. Of Mr. Vennard she never spoke at all. No one could have been more entirely forgotten. But when he married Lucy Ellicott, he did not desire any strong or forcible points of character. He had not considered his child's welfare — only his own insatiable desire for wealth.

Stephen felt that it would be impossible to go away

and leave Hope alone with her mother. When this fever strength was spent, the last great change might come. Presently she grew drowsy, and fell into snatches of slumber, broken by incoherent mutterings. He drew his chair nearer the bed, and took Hope upon his knee. The poor, tired girl yielded to the sense of warmth, and relief from hunger, and leaned against the strong arm passed around her. In a few moments she was asleep.

Stephen watched her with peculiar sensations. An awe and tenderness, a strong feeling of duty, a devout thankfulness that he had found her, when she so sorely needed a friend, mingled with a strange delight that proceeded from none of these. He could not analyze this; indeed, he did not try. He was content with the present, and neither burdened himself with the future and dim dreams of what might come, nor brooded over an unalterable past.

Mrs. Forsyth stirred again. "Hope," she exclaimed, in sick impatience, "I'm hungry! I do believe, child, you'd see me lie here and starve."

In the sweet land whither Hope had gone, she heard not the voice. Stephen touched her shoulder gently.

"O!" She gave a long sigh.

"Your mother needs something, Hope."

She was on her feet now, her senses all alert, her eyes wide open. Mrs. Forsyth moved at the sound of the strange voice.

"O," she said, in a vague way, "I remember. You came with Hope. I'm hungry, child." And Stephen smiled to himself, remarking how much more gentle the tone was.

Hope obeyed her mother's behest. The dying eyes wandered with a restless, glassy stare, but she took the food as if indeed famishing.

"If you must go —" she said at length, looking at Stephen.

"No, it is not safe for you to be left alone. I will remain all night."

"You are very kind. I never expected to ask so much of strangers, I'm sure. I suppose I cannot last much longer. I do not care. I have nothing to live for. I couldn't even do Hope any good. It was shameful in him to treat me so, when I let him take everything! To die here like a dog, while he is flaunting off with that miserable thing! I hope he'll leave her in just such distress. He's a mean, selfish brute! O, if I'd never married him! We would be rich now, Hope, living in luxury, with servants to wait upon us. O Heaven! how bitter it is!"

Her voice died away in moans. Hope lighted another candle, and stirred the fire. Then she came back, and smoothed the sufferer's brow until she fell into another doze. Stephen held out his arms. She nestled in the tender clasp again. The city clocks were striking twelve.

Presently Hope fell asleep. Stephen watched and thought. This human soul, weak and helpless, drifting out to the broad ocean of eternity! What work, or what good, had it ever done in the world? And yet, God kept a place for every one. He took the tangled threads in His hands, and made out of the confused mass a shapely web. Some day all the mysteries would be explained — why one was weak and easily tempted, why another trode in thorny paths, or was left to work blindly, groping along with many doubts and fears, and why some were blessed beyond compare with all that makes life desirable — love, home, and wealth. No trials — few cares. It was well for human faith that there were some happy souls.

Once before he had watched with the dying. All the long night! He shivered, thinking of it. If — how strangely we can carry back our reasoning! — if Thomas Vennard had been stunned that summer day, as his assailant meant, or if the blow had missed its aim, what then? He and his father would have been hunted to the utmost verge. Vennard was relentless and vindictive. Instead — who had brought all this about? He was the prosperous man. He had succeeded over the ruins of another's life, as one might say. Where God's direct agency came in, was too awful a subject for his vain questioning. He had been given a sacred duty — that was enough for him now.

The candle flared out its ghostly yellow light. The sick woman tossed uneasily, murmured broken sentences, and occasionally roused to ask for a drink. Stephen gave it to her with the one hand at liberty. He bathed her brow with fragrant water, and administered from time to time the cordial the physician had left. The fire burned out—there was no more wood to replenish it. The remnant of the candle fell into a pool of its own grease, and sputtered out a farewell. Through the window came a faint glimmer of dawn, softening from gray to pink, from pink to crimson and gold. The air of the room grew chilly, and Stephen strained Hope close to his heart.

"I've had such a nice sleep!" she exclaimed at length, opening her lovely eyes, just as a faint streak of sunshine stole in the window. "And, O, it's morning! Did you hold me all night?" and a conscious color fluttered up in her face. "You must be very, very tired!"

Stephen felt stiff and cramped from the awkward position, but hardly fatigued.

"You have been so kind!" Her breath came with a sigh. "I wonder—" But that was cut short by Mrs. Forsyth's awakening.

"Mamma, dearest," and Hope bent to kiss her.

"I'm so much better, Hope! I never thought to live the night through. I am so easy! no pain, and very

little coughing. If we were still rich, I should want to get well ; but it's of no use."

A greenish pallor had overspread her face, and her eyes were frightfully sunken. Stephen noted these sure signs of dissolution.

Hope began to bustle about the room.

"I'll go for some wood," Stephen said.

"I'm sure we're very grateful to you," was Mrs. Forsyth's comment. "A perfect stranger, too — we don't even know your name."

"Stephen Dane," he answered.

Hope was bending over the ashes, and did not even glance up. If Lucy Ellicott had ever heard any such name, she had forgotten it now.

He went for the wood, and purchased a few luxuries for breakfast. Hope was a handy little housekeeper, swift, noiseless, and patient. How often she must have suffered from Mrs. Forsyth's unreasoning whims and fretful moods !

"I think," he began, presently, "that I must return to my friends and give some account of myself. You will not mind being left alone an hour or two?"

"O, no. And mamma is so much better !"

He glanced furtively at the bed. "You have neighbors you can call on in an emergency?"

"We haven't made friends with any of them," Hope

replied, with downcast eyes. "And they think us proud."

"Any one will come in time of need," he said, thoughtfully. "I shall not be gone long."

He bade Mrs. Forsyth a cheerful good morning. The fresh, keen air was inspiring to him. Still, he hurried along, impelled by some vague sense of danger.

He found Mr. and Mrs. Adams in a state of consternation, but he lost no time in explaining the cause of his absence. They both listened in astonishment.

"To think that you should have met the child in such a plight! Actually begging! I wonder that Vennard did not rise out of his grave and haunt the villain who brought them to this. Yes, let us go immediately. Pet," to Mrs. Adams, "get your bonnet."

"But Mr. Dane must have some breakfast. After watching all night, too!"

"I had some, thank you."

"It could have been hardly worth the eating. Let me make you a cup of fresh coffee."

"No, I must return as soon as possible."

But "Pet" dallied after the fashion of women. She had her dress to change, orders to give for dinner, and a dozen other little matters to take up her time. Stephen paced the sitting-room and talked to his friend. At last they were started.

Mrs. Adams held her breath with a strange awe and

pity as they mounted the dirty steps. Stephen rapped lightly at the door.

There was no answer, so he opened it and walked in, leaving them to follow. His first glance was at the bed. There lay Mrs. Forsyth, the eyes staring wide, but all meaning gone from them—the under jaw dropped down, and a small purple thread of blood issuing from the mouth.

"O!" Hope raised herself from the foot of the bed, where she had been striving to hide from the fearful sight. Her eyes were tearless, her face white and frightened.

"Is she dead? O, mamma! mamma!"

Stephen placed his hand on the heart. It had stopped beyond a peradventure. Then he caught Hope as she was about to throw herself beside the dead body.

"O," she said, brokenly, with a great, dry sob, "she *did* love me, and I loved her. It is so terrible to be all alone!"

"You will never be alone again." Stephen's lips were close to her ear, his strong arms around her.

"But you can't love me—"

"Yes, I can love you. I *do* love you." His voice came through waves of suppressed feeling.

She buried her face on the great, true heart, that was to be hers forevermore.

By this time Mrs. Adams had advanced to the bed.

"O!" she exclaimed, "we are too late. Was this little thing all alone with her mother, when —"

Her voice recalled both Stephen and Hope. One is often alone with joy, but there are so many events connected with grief that bring us back to every-day life. Wisely ordered by a mind farther-reaching than ours.

Stephen said, briefly, "How long ago?"

"I don't know." There was a dreary grief in Hope's eyes. "She was talking, and she seemed so strong! Then she began to cough."

Stephen and Adams consulted together. Then the former started in pursuit of some kindly neighbor, while Adams went for an undertaker. Mrs. Adams tried to comfort Hope. The child listened—that was all. There was but one voice that had power to soothe her.

On Stephen's return he asked Hope to put on her hat and shawl, and go with him.

"Mamma?" Her pale lips quivered.

"You will see her again presently. Mr. and Mrs. Adams will attend to all that is necessary."

Hope did his bidding. Once in the street, he took her by the hand, and led her she knew not whither. Only at last they came to a pretty house, and, being admitted by the servant, he led her into the sitting-room.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"No, only —" and then her eyes slowly filled with tears.

"This is Mr. Adams's house. Mamma will be sent up here, and kept until she is buried. Afterwards I am going to take you home with me, to Philadelphia, if you will go?"

"I did have some relatives there, but I believe they are dead," she said, absently.

"I don't want to find any friend or relative. I mean to keep you. It is a debt I owe. If you can trust me —"

The look said, "If not you, who then on the wide earth?" But presently, with a little flush of delicacy, she made answer, —

"Do you know I am very poor? Papa Forsyth spent everything we had. He was cruel to mamma — poor mamma!"

"That is why I want you. I said it was a debt. All that I can do for you will never repay it. I must be brother and — father to you," and here his voice grew husky.

Hope was too much stunned by her recent grief, too much surprised by all the late events, to be curious. Circumstances had never cultivated this quality of her nature. And something that she could not understand gave her perfect confidence in Stephen. But she was too weary and frightened to talk. She simply came and

placed her hand in his. These little mute appeals were strongly characteristic of Hope. She was not a talkative child, but often impressed you more by a single gesture than many words would have done.

After Mr. and Mrs. Adams returned, a hearse brought all that was mortal of Mrs. Forsyth, shrouded, ready for sepulture. Silas declared it looked too heathenish to bury it the same day, and there seemed no other course. Hope could eat no dinner, and Mrs. Adams took her off to her room, and insisted upon her going to bed. The tired and overwrought nerves succumbed to these kind attentions, and she soon fell asleep.

The next day Mrs. Forsyth was buried. Stephen had announced his intentions respecting Hope.

"I am sure I'd be willing to help take care of the child, Dane, until she can do for herself. What a scamp that Forsyth was! and, between us, I never had a high opinion of Mrs. Vennard. But it is shameful that the poor child must be the greatest sufferer."

"She never will be. You are kind, Adams, but I want to do it all myself. I may never have wife nor child to share my prosperity, and she will be doubly welcome."

"There's something about you, Stephen, that I've never been able to make out wholly. A sort of chivalrous feeling that, since you were successful where Vennard failed, you must needs owe him a duty. I don't feel so at all.

A man has a right to the labor of his own brains, surely. And if it had been a point of honor before, his death settled that. In the old times you saw no cause for gratitude. He did grind the men to the last notch."

"I'm odd in some matters," Stephen Dane said, looking into the grate fire, and thrusting down the black secret he carried about with him. "And God seems to have sent this child to me; so, having no one else, I'll care for her."

"The best thing you can do is to marry;" and Adams laughed good-humoredly. "It gives a man an interest in all the rest of the world."

Mrs. Adams had busied herself in preparing some proper clothing for Hope. Until the past summer the child had been comfortable, and comparatively happy. When Mrs. Forsyth went to Europe, Hope had been placed at a good boarding-school, where she had remained, spending most of her vacations as well, until the last cruel step on Mr. Forsyth's part. Hope was shocked, when she came home, to find her step-mother so much of an invalid, and to learn of sufferings caused by a brutal and selfish husband. Poverty had followed hard upon the desertion; yet this had been the only miserable period in Hope's life, happily brief.

Stephen had written to Joe, appointing a day for his return, and informing her of the addition he was to make

in the family, but not mentioning Hope's name. During his absence Joe had been spending a fortnight in Tregony with Sally Fawcett. She had counted much on the visit, yet it must be confessed it was something of a failure. Unconsciously Joe had taken upon herself a few of the graces and the tastes of her new life. The disorderly household, the rude, rough children, the brawling matron, and the jolly but undeniably coarse head of the house, filled Joe with a strange dismay. Everything seemed changed; the hills smaller; the irregular village, with its faded old houses, such a contrast to her memory of it. Yes, she had outgrown all these things, and longed for the neat, orderly home, the quiet, and, more than ever, for Stephen. The world grows narrower with every old dream that dies out, and we cling more tenderly to the friends who are left.

"I wonder if we shall like this little girl!" Joe had said to old black Katy twenty times at least. "It's so odd of him to want to bring her home!"

But the sitting-room looked bright and cheerful as the autumn day drew to a close. Joe's hair was brushed until it shone like satin, and she had a knot of scarlet ribbon at her throat. She waited impatiently enough, listening to every carriage and every footfall. And at last they came.

Joe sprang to the door and opened it. Never in all her life had she been so glad to see Stephen. One or

two happy tears fell on his shoulder, where she buried her face after he had kissed it.

The three entered the sitting-room. Joe looked curiously at the child, and said, "Why, I didn't think she was so large!"

Stephen removed her hat and cloak, and turned her around, facing Joe. "Have you ever seen her before?" he asked.

Joe gazed carelessly at first; then the expression deepened. She came and put her hands on Hope's shoulders, and looked into her eyes.

"Good Heavens, Stephen!" she said. "It's Hope Vennard!"

It was the child's turn to wonder. She had been too full of grief to think or question before. Now, as she glanced from one to the other, she exclaimed, —

"How do you all know my name is Hope Vennard?"

Joe mutely appealed to Stephen for answer.

The explanation *must* come some time.

"We knew your father," he said. "We used to live in Tregony."

"When he was — when he died?" For Hope stopped, shivering at the ugly word "murdered." Both her companions remarked it. Joe stole a sidelong glance at Stephen, which he felt, rather than saw. He made a great effort to obtain perfect mastery over himself, and answered, —

"Yes, we worked in the Foundry, both Mr. Adams and I. We left Tregony that autumn."

Hope was studying Stephen attentively. She came close to him, and looked into his eyes.

"I believe I remember;" but her voice had a vague, confused sound, and her eyes wandered over him uncertainly. "I was in the Foundry one night, and a man held me up that I might look into a kettle of melted iron. He was so strong! I used to think of it nights as I was falling asleep, and it gave me such a good, safe feeling. It was you."

"Yes." Stephen breathed hard.

"O, I am so glad to come back to you!" and, with a little cry, Hope hid herself in the clasp of the strong arms again.

A pang shot through Joe's waiting heart. As if already she was crowded out of her place.

"This is my cousin Josephine," Stephen said presently, bethinking himself. "And this is to be your home until you are tired of it, and want to go away."

"I never shall," was Hope's confident rejoinder.

And thus began a new era, not only in the life of Hope Vennard, but in that of both of the others. Stephen Dane meant to atone for his father's sin in his tender care of this friendless child.

IX.

LOVE.

IT was strange how soon and how easily Hope Venard settled herself in her new home. It was not natural that the death of Mrs. Forsyth should occasion any deep or permanent sorrow. She had never tried to attach Hope to herself until she became dependent upon her kindly services as nurse; and even then real love was lacking. And Hope just fitted into this empty niche in Stephen Dane's home. A noisy or demonstrative child must have worked a change; with Hope everything went on as usual. And although Joe received her a trifle coldly at first, there was a silent charm about her that the elder could not resist. How it came to pass neither remembered, perhaps, but in a little while they were fast friends. Much of it was due to Joe's womanly longing for affection. And when the child laid her golden head in Joe's lap, or twined her soft arms about the other's neck, a warm sympathy grew up between them. I think Hope exercised a strong and mysterious

sway by right of her beauty. It was a daily miracle to Joe. The soft, shining hair, floating out in rippling, golden waves; the clear, pearly complexion, with the delicate, peachy tint in the cheeks; those large, wonderful eyes, in which you could seem to see the depths of her pure soul; the grace of her figure and every motion; the hundred winsome ways, — fascinated Joe as with a spell.

Another charm was her voice. There was something peculiar in this, and it touched you nearly as much in her talking as in her singing. Stephen had added a piano since her coming, for her education had been in no wise neglected; indeed, in music she had attained an unusual proficiency, for it had hitherto been the one solace of her life. To Katy in the kitchen this was a perfect marvel. More than once she said, "Miss Joe, if eber I git to heaben, I 'spect to hear jes' sich singin'. It's like the angels now."

But the quiet evenings when they were alone pleased Joe the best, perhaps. With Hope's head in her lap, and the soft, white fingers clasping hers, dropping now and then a kiss, or pressing them with childish impulse against cheek and dimpled chin, and talking as no one ever had to Joe before. No wonder the poor, hungry heart feasted. Fate, in shutting her out from all other loves, had made her the more easily assailed by this.

Between Stephen and Hope there existed something

for which reserve is too strong a name ; and yet it was a distance. Nothing bordering on coldness or distrust. Hope went to him as frankly in any emergency as if he had really been her brother. And he was tender and considerate ; but there was a point which neither passed, a boundary which seemed to have been settled once for all when he brought her there. Perhaps Joe had unwittingly deepened the impression. One evening, after Hope had been detailing somewhat of her past life, she said, eagerly, —

“I remember so little about my father ! I mean to ask your cousin the particulars concerning his death. He must surely know. Mamma never talked about him : she said it was too terrible for women. Will he mind, do you think ? ”

“No, don’t ask him,” Joe exclaimed, with sudden dread. “He can’t tell you.”

“Why ? He was there ! ”

“Yes, but — ” Joe shivered at a flood of old recollections.

“He said — when mamma died, it was — that he owed a debt. How did it come ? ”

“Did he tell you that ? ” Joe asked, fiercely. “And what else ? ”

“Nothing. O, please don’t look at me in that manner ! What was it about papa ? They never found who murdered him. Did he — did your cousin know — ”

"Hush." Joe's voice was hoarse with the passion of fright. "No one ever found out anything. He might have fallen in the river and injured himself. If any one *can* tell, I don't believe he or she ever will now. It's all past and gone. But don't ask him, child — Stephen. Promise me!"

The look in Joe's face awed Hope. She promised solemnly.

"And now let us say no more about it. No good can ever come of it. May be in the judgment day it'll be told."

Hope did not make herself miserable trying to solve this mystery, or the other one, the debt of which Stephen had spoken. And as she grew older, new impressions effaced these. She was too happy to brood over that indistinct past. On this point she obeyed Joe scrupulously. And Stephen, fancying she had forgotten her father, had no wish to recall him to her mind.

Of the peaceful days that glided over them I have but little to tell. Five years, that had seemed almost a lifetime to Stephen Dane when he brought Hope Vennard home, passed with few outward changes, reckoned by events. She blossomed into womanhood with all the beauty her early years had promised. The grace of her own dead mother must have come out in her, for Stephen watched in vain for some sign of her father. She was so gentle and winsome, so lavish with her

smiles and tenderness, so generous in every act, and feeling! Friends she made readily. Groups of gay young girls besieged her, and would have engrossed every spare hour if she so willed; but many of them were sacred to Joe. And what of brightness and joy she could bring into the house, she did gladly. It had been so sweet a place of refuge to her.

Stephen Dane at thirty-three had reached his full manhood. There was in him now an element of conscious and well-trying strength, a healthy, liberal life. He had fought some hard battles, and received some wounds, but they left no rankling bitterness. Grave he would always be; but it was a sweet, tender gravity, the touch of some old sorrow that had entered his being and become a part of him, a softened shadow, as you sometimes see on a summer day, stealing partly over a meadow-slope, while the rest is bathed in brilliant sunshine. The old vexed questions had been forever set at rest, not by any triumphant solution, but the simple faith we must all come to at last. Whatever God willed, whatever had come upon him without his own volition, was to be borne patiently. Wherein he had sinned he repented truly and humbly, and then he went forward to do his duty towards his fellow-men. By that rare experience vouchsafed only to deep, far-reaching souls, he knew where to aid, where to speak a word in season. More than one who had gone astray

listened and was reclaimed. He, too, had been beset by perils and temptations, and, instead of condemning, yearned over others with infinite pity.

It seemed to him he had gone on prospering far beyond his deserts. After the old ambitions had been reached, he was satisfied; but Fortune, so chary at first, now became bountiful. As if she could not lavish enough upon him! A position in the scientific world of which he had not even dreamed, friends that he had never dared to count on, and wealth more than sufficient to satisfy his wishes. Was there anything lacking?

Yes, one gift, one blessing.

The night he had held Hope asleep in his arms dimly prefigured this. That he should love her seemed right and natural. He had meant to give her everything in his power, affection amongst the rest. All this unquestioningly until now.

What roused him first with a thrill of terror and pain was the knowledge that his soul longed for a return. That his regard had merged into something stronger and more absolute than friendly or even fraternal love. The whole passion of his life centred in Hope Vennard. How it had come about he could hardly tell. But the strong manhood in him asserted itself. He found his desires eager and vehement. He glanced tremblingly adown the future, and saw the hard fight before him.

There was an impassable barrier between. Another hand had placed it there.

It may shock you, but in these first moments he almost hated his poor old father lying in the grave. Forgive him. It was so hard to bear! And God knows how truly he repented all these weak, passion-stained hours. But to feel himself Hope Vennard's equal in every point, to have the consciousness that he might win her, and be held back by this, was too bitter!

Life would be too perfect with this one delicious dream realized. He hardly dared think of such joy. No, it was a land he should only behold from mountaintops, but never reach.

And Hope, unconscious of this, made herself sweeter every day. For him, alone. As a little girl, pleasing him had been her first duty. Now it grew into something tenderer. I do not know as she understood herself why his approbation was so much to her, why she treasured every smile, why she spurred up Joe's latent energies to make home more attractive.

Hope Vennard's nature had that delicate finish,—call it tact, if you will, though that hardly expresses it,—the rare faculty of understanding and meeting the moods of another. Joe lacked this entirely! Some things she avoided from a sort of dumb terror, like admitting her knowledge of Stephen's secret; but in so many respects

she was deficient in that womanly adaptiveness that renders some so charming! More than once she had been made absolutely cross and miserable by its exercise in Hope. And through these years she had come to perceive that her vague dreams respecting Stephen could never be reality. She could see the inharmoniousness of their natures—that while his had broadened and deepened, while he had grown to be the perfect gentleman, she had taken on few new graces. Hope played and sang to him; when she met with a choice little poem, she read it aloud, or, better still, repeated it in her rich, enchanting tones, just at twilight, when it was most effective. She embroidered slippers, or put his initials in the corners of pocket handkerchiefs, with her dainty needle, that seemed endowed with magic. If she twined a flower in her hair, it drooped in the most exquisite manner. Everything she touched grew lovelier from the contact.

And then she was in the first flush of girlhood, Joe fading in her thirties. Yet it must be confessed the years improved her, or else Hope's influence. I think the young girl, in the lavish generosity of her nature, would have endowed Joe with half her beauty, and half her gifts, had such a thing been possible. As it was, she always brought her out into the best light, when Joe was not sullen and ungracious, as she never could be long with Hope.

And her eyes at last saw what both were unconscious of betraying. There had always been a little dull jealousy regarding Hope. Yet Stephen seldom petted her as one naturally might a child, and Hope had been shy in this one respect, though free enough in all others. But the certainty had come gradually upon Joe, first that Stephen could never love her, and then that he loved another. It roused her to a sort of angry desperation. How dared Stephen think of the child, when his hand was red with the father's blood!

For all this time the belief had clung stubbornly to Joe that she alone had solved the mystery. I am not sure but it rendered her the more persistently tender towards him, knowing there was one thing that his new life and position could never efface, a deed that brought him down to the lowest level. She had received Hope the more kindly because she felt Stephen owed her some amends, and she was willing to share his burden. But that any warmer interest should exist, seemed monstrous even to her narrow mind.

Yet the years had been very pleasant to them all, interspersed with an occasional visit to New York, the first of which had been the grandest holiday in Joe's life. Many quiet little home pleasures had brightened the time, for Stephen had truly endeavored to make them both happy. He had meant to devote his whole life to this object. Every indulgence was lavished upon Hope.

If she had so willed, she might have reigned a queen. She was neither imperious nor selfish; she liked better to give than to receive; and since in so many things she must be a recipient, she gave daily of her abundant sweetness.

And so they came around to March — to a time that was always a little festival. They were rather late at breakfast, for Joe had been suffering from a severe cold for several days. As Stephen rose from the table he said, —

"Hope, run up to my room and bring me a roll of drawings lying on my desk. I forgot them."

Hope was off like a flash, up to the apartment before Joe had found the energy to say, —

"Why, you laid them in the book-case last night, Stephen, after you finished the model."

"Did I? I believe you're right, though;" and as he went to the sitting-room, he called out, "They're down here, Hope."

She met him at the doorway, flushed and smiling. He was slowly buttoning his coat.

"Too bad!" he began, with a smile. "I'm growing old and forgetful."

"Are you?" There was a sort of merry light in her face.

"Do you know what day it is?" he asked.

"My birthday."

"And what do you want, girlie? I ought to have thought sooner, and given you a party."

"Next year you may. I shall be a woman grown then. So don't be too lavish, for I have a fancy I shall live to be a venerable dame, and there's a many birth-days from seventeen to seventy."

"Seventeen!" he repeated, looking her over. Hardly medium size, slender and round, with pliant, shapely limbs, and the fair face full of softest pencillings. How wonderfully beautiful it was! The tiny veins filling with the lightest emotion, making her flush with a thought; the tender, luminous eyes; and the ripe, full mouth inviting caresses with its dainty curves. O, if she could be his! He drew a long, long breath.

"Does it frighten you — the prospect of my growing old? You look so grave."

He placed both arms around her, and, yielding to the half-unconscious pressure, her head sunk upon his breast.

"No, it was not that." His voice had a strange, strangled sound, and then he paused for many seconds.

"Something came in my mind just then — a subject that has troubled me sorely. Help me to decide, Hope."

"If I can."

"Hope," — the voice was tremulous as well as husky, now, — "suppose one man committed a deadly sin

against another, in one of those evil moments of life when temptation was strong, and human nature weak. It changed the man's whole course, deprived him of home, caused him much suffering; but if the other repented sincerely, humbly, and made all the restitution in his power, do you think he *could* be forgiven?"

"Why not, Stephen?"

"O, you do not understand," and he roused himself. "What if it had been you. If some one had wronged you bitterly, deprived you of every pleasure and comfort, sent you into the world —"

"An outcast, a beggar, as I was. And Mr. Forsyth wronged me. No, don't speak. Has he come back?"

That answered Stephen Dane's purpose as an illustration. "Well, if he had returned," he went on, hurriedly, "if he made or was willing to make all the reparation in his power, could you forgive him?"

"I could not forget that he had sinned against another as well. Sometimes one feels the wrongs of one's friends more keenly than one's own. And poor mamma!"

Stephen struck his clenched hand to his forehead. The pulses in his temple throbbed with passionate anguish. Yes, if she knew all, she would hate him for his father's crime.

"You couldn't forgive him then?" There was a

despairing entreaty in his tone, something that pleaded powerfully, but could not hope.

"It would be hard, but I should do it at last, because it was right. Only — I couldn't love him."

"No; a man must be wild to expect it. A blind, weak fool! O, Hope, there is just such a man in the world, and he cannot feel satisfied with the forgiveness — he wants the love. His life looks so barren without it! But it is right. God means every sin shall be atoned for by its kind. Dear, it is cruel for me to torment you."

His manner moved her strangely.

"It is Mr. Forsyth," she said. "I forgive him because you plead for him, because I—" she was about to add, "because I love you," in its simplest fashion; and then, with a great rush of feeling, that drowned out every other thought, she knew she could never utter the words again until he asked for them. The innocence of ignorance was gone, and love was almost shamed into guilt by the suddenness of the revelation; so she stood trembling in his arms.

He mistook her agitation.

"No," he answered, "it is not Mr. Forsyth. I don't think he will ever be so far repentant" — with a grim, hard smile. "It was another man."

Hope's breath came hard and rapid. Stephen felt it against his heart. "Forgive me," he said, softly.

"No, you have never sinned against me."

"If I had?"

For answer she raised her face until it met his, and kissed him. A vague suspicion entered his mind, but he dared not even give it room. Then he put her away from him, and walked slowly through the hall, bewildered. If it was possible to believe!

Hope threw herself on the sofa, and buried her head deep in the pillow. The burning face, with the temples throbbing so wildly from an emotion that was neither fear nor expectation, but something quite new and overwhelming. She could not think. She only breathed until Joe called.

"Do you know it is almost nine, Hope? What are you doing?"

Hope ran for her hat and shawl, gathered up her books, and was off to school. The wild March blast blew in her face, but she never heeded it. The thick gray skies lowered about her, yet she was insensible to their influence. She could not seem to waken herself from the strange spell.

Joe had the house to herself all day. Katy would not let her do any work, but settled her on the sofa, and tied up her aching head with a napkin dripping with aromatic vinegar; and there Hope found her on her return at three in the afternoon. She petted her a little while. There was something magnetic in Hope's fingers, as well as her smile. And to-day, a wonderful light in her face that startled Joe.

"What is the matter?" she asked, at length.

"Nothing. I am seventeen, you know. I ought to look different."

"I don't see why," was Joe's pettish rejoinder, thinking of her own lost and unlovely youth. Yet at seventeen she had dreamed. How vain and idle it had proved!

Stephen, coming in, found Hope kneeling beside his cousin, one white, slender hand in Joe's raven hair.

"There!" he exclaimed, dropping a box into the other.

She opened it with a child's eager delight. A beautiful set of pearls.

"O, you are so good—isn't he, Joe? I wanted pearls so much! A thousand thanks!"

Then their eyes met, and hers drooped, while a dainty hue flitted over her face.

"I'm sorry you are sick, Joe," she went on, to hide her embarrassment. "We ought to have a good gay time, for one can never be seventeen again."

"No;" and the tears overflowed Joe's eyes. The world seemed wide, and weary, and desolate.

She came out to dinner, though Hope took the head of the table. Stephen watched her with a new interest, and, like Joe, thought something strangely beguiling had taken possession of her. It was not so much in what she said as what she did, and even her very silence was expressive.

The night closed in with a storm. Joe's headache grew worse; perhaps, too, there was an undefined pain in her heart, that could have no name. As if she felt the storm, that was to overwhelm her some day, slowly coming on, and she must gather up her forces to resist it. She cowered pitifully in the dumb anguish of mental as well as physical pain, and wanted darkness and solitude. I do not know that she prayed for any courage or strength; she had no faith just then.

When Hope could keep her on the sofa no longer, she accompanied her to her sleeping-room. Joe submitted to the ministrations of the soft fingers, because she felt too weak and miserable to resist; but once in bed, she would not allow Hope to remain.

It seemed so odd for the young girl to spend that whole evening with Stephen! They were so rarely alone, except for some few stray moments! This very distance had made love stronger and keener.

She took her sewing and went on quietly, now and then giving Stephen a furtive glance. He sat just before the grate, — they always used the grate in this room; it was his fancy, — and now, with his head a little bowed, he was peering into the ruddy glare. Hope studied the broad shoulders, the clustering chestnut curls, the proud, almost massive head. He was so good, so strong, that it rested her to look at him. And then she thought of their morning's talk. What had it meant? All day she had been wondering if it was possi-

ble that Mr. Forsyth *had* returned. But, then, he could have nothing to do with her.

Stephen turned suddenly, and caught the glance of her steadfast eyes. They did not even waver, so intent was she.

"A dull birthday, Hope. Next year we must have the party."

"You give me something better than parties every day of my life," she said, gravely. "It has been a long, bright holiday since I have known you."

"Has it? I am glad. I meant it to be."

She came and stood beside him, moved by some sudden impulse. He glanced searchingly into her face. Was this a girlish whim, or did it have a deeper meaning?

"Stephen," she said, "will you tell me more about the man you spoke of this morning?"

"Does he interest you? It has been a perplexing question to me, how far he had a right to take forgiveness, even."

"He should take it just as freely as it was extended to him. And if he repented truly, he in some sort earned the forgiveness."

"God knows he did. Hope, do you believe forgiveness washes away sin?"

"Truly and fully."

"And that blight effaced by years of earnest endeavor

to do rightly and deal justly, raises him once more to the ranks of his fellow-men?"

"I wish you would tell me the story, Stephen."

"No, I cannot. It is another person's secret, too. The story of a sad, gnarled, wretched life, that might have been so much better. Two lives merged into one, as it were; the later always trying to make amends for the earlier. And when the toil was done, the justification worked out as far as human hands could do it, you think this poor, burdened soul might dare to taste the cup of happiness held to his lips?"

She could not tell how it was, but she connected him with the story. Something in his past life that had gone wrong, a mistake — crime she could not impute to him. The effects of this had shadowed his life. If she could banish this cloud!

"Yes," she said, resolutely. "If God brings happiness to any man or woman, after a long and sore punishment, and the proud soul casts it aside, it is blackest ingratitude."

"I think God has brought it to me;" low and softly, drawing her down on his knee, and enfolding her with his arms. The one home in the wide world to her.

He had been struggling fiercely with himself all day, carrying about a certainty that Hope Vennard loved him. If she did, nothing could justify him in making her unhappy. True, she was young, and had seen little of the

world. There might be others — The hard grip jealousy gave his heart told him how strong and dominant his love was, how resolved to gain its object. All of life was as nothing compared to this one little girl. Yet he had forced himself into a patient mood before his return home, resolved to wait without one overt act, until he read her secret. If he became necessary to her, the question would be decided by something higher than merely his own wishes.

Holding her there, his reasoning all went to the winds. The warm, fragrant breath upon his cheek, the red of the sweet lips, made redder by the glow of the fire-light, the drooping lids, with their long fringes hiding some secret in the eyes, — he was but a man, after all.

"Hope, I love you."

Only a whisper — a breath. It was so deathly still afterwards that they could hear their hearts beat.

"What is it?" and now his voice trembled with its vehement passion.

"What can it be, Stephen? Only one thing."

"You love me?"

"I love you."

The story of both lives was told. Tender kisses and happy silence.

Why need she know that miserable history? Surely God would not hold him answerable for the sin of another. And now his whole heart, his whole exist-

ence, should make it up to Hope. No wish should ever be left ungratified, no want experienced. For the past, let it go. He shook it off like an old garment, and sat there enfranchised by love. All the long-repressed strength and sweetness of his nature came out now. He drank such delicious draughts of happiness that heart and brain blazed up into a subtile flame. Why, he had just learned what it was to live !

He would have lingered there until morning but for Hope. Consciousness came to her first. The fire in the grate had fallen into a sleepy smoulder. Katy had long since locked the doors and gone to bed. And now Hope pleaded for a release.

He stood up at length, with his arm still around her. He took her to the light, and studied her face, full of bashful blushes.

"You are mine," he said, exultantly. "And if no dearer tie should come between us, you would still be mine. If it was forbidden in this world that I should call you by the sweetest of all names, wife, you could never give the right to another. Is it not so?"

"I am yours for all time, Stephen ;" and there was a strong and solemn cadence in her voice.

"Thank God !"

She went to her room, but he sat over the dying fire and dreamed.

X.

TWO WOMEN.

HOPE remained for her music lesson the next day, and when she came home, dinner was on the table. Her quick eye noticed there was no plate for Stephen. It flashed upon her, as foolish misgivings often do, what if she should never see him again!

"Where is Stephen?" she asked, rather fearfully.

"Gone to Washington for several days. He was sorry to start in such a hurry, and left his good-by with me."

"And you are better, Joe. I'm so glad!"

"My head doesn't ache, but I feel miserably weak. I shall be all right in a few days."

They ate their dinner almost in silence. Hope went to her room afterwards in a curious mood, longing to be alone, and yet strangely lonesome. She glanced out of the window towards the west. The sun was setting in the cold March sky, pale-blue overhead, with streaks of salmon-color deepening into orange. No rose or soft,

hazy purples to break the monotony with their fleecy drifts.

Turning, a letter on the table caught her eye. "Hope Vennard," written in the clear, bold hand she knew so well. It was like Stephen Dane's face — trusty. She could almost see the honest light in the earnest, brown eyes.

She pressed it to her lips first, murmuring thanks for his thoughtful regard. Then she dallied with the seal, in her sweet, girlish fashion, quaffing the anticipated delight slowly. There was the beginning, at length, — "Hope, my darling!"

A long, long letter. She strained her eyes by the waning light to read the last. It seemed as if he had said nothing before, and all was here. Going back to the night he had found her, lingering slowly over all the years that had fallen between, and coming to his resolve that he would wait until she had seen more of life, of men, that she might be the surer of her own heart, — the resolve prudence dictated, and love had failed to keep. Yet there were other thoughts that required consideration. He was so much older. True, he gave her his heart's first and only love; but if it lacked any freshness that she would miss in days to come, any fervor of youth that she might long for, Heaven only knew how sorely it would pain him to feel

that he had over-persuaded her in his selfish love. So she must ponder it well. And then he said, —

“Can my darling have perfect faith in me — believe me, trust me? There are dark pages in my past, I know — a burden laid upon me by another hand; but turning those leaves, I purpose to begin a new life. Nay, it was begun long ago, and needs but the seal of her love and trust to make it blessed and perfect. Can she give me so much? My heart, my daily thoughts, are all hers. Shall we begin here the life that is to be completed before God and the angels?”

There was much more. At the conclusion he decided this brief separation was wise for both. In the mean while she must study her own heart, and rest forever assured, whichever way she felt impelled to act, that her happiness was his first wish.

I think any woman would have been moved by the tender love. When it was quite dark, Hope leaned her face against the window casing and wept softly — why, she could hardly have told. Is there an undertone of sadness in a great joy? For she was very, very happy.

Presently she remembered Joe, and groped her way out to the hall. Hope was always generous with her pleasures. She wanted some one to share every delight, and since there was no longer a doubt as to their love, she must make Joe glad in her joy. Poor Joe — did she ever have a lover? Not like Stephen — no one

could be so grand and sweet ; but some one who had held her in his arms, and kissed her.

She opened the door and entered quietly. Joe sat in an arm-chair on one side of the fire. How still and sacred the room was ! just the time and place for such a confidence.

Hope knelt down and clasped Joe's hand in both of hers. It was large and red ; no amount of care ever made it soft and white. She caressed it tenderly ; then, burying her face in Joe's lap, she murmured with a tremulousness that sounded not unlike sobs, —

“ O, Joe, he loves me, he loves me ! ”

Joe started, and sat upright. “ Not Stephen ! ” she exclaimed in a quick, sharp tone.

“ Yes, Stephen. Why not ? I am not good enough for him, but then no one is. And I can give him youth, and beauty, and love. I can make him happy.”

For a moment Joe's brain whirled in helpless terror. The blow had come, and she was not prepared. We may think over an emergency, and fancy ourselves strong ; but we cannot be sure until the test, like a galvanic shock, is applied to the unknown weak spot, and the whole body reels and quivers.

“ What is it ? O, Joe ! ” and Hope started at the dilating eyes and ashen face.

“ You can't marry him ! ” she gasped. “ God's curse would be on it. He had no right to your love — he knows it.”

"He has *every* right." Hope sprang up and poised her golden-crowned head with lofty pride. "Did he not take me to his heart and home when I was an outcast? Think of the happy years he has showered upon me! And shall I make him no return? O, Joe, you are wild, indeed! He has done everything for me, and I am proud to-night to feel that I love him and he deserves it."

I do not know that I can make you understand Josephine Dane. She was not purely vindictive; she took no delight in thwarting Stephen or Hope. Only now that the fiery trial had come, the fierce flames proved too much for her. Stephen's sin brought him nearer her level, and she felt she would rather go on always in this fashion than have him so completely engrossed by another. She loved him, too. She had suffered for him. What did this child know? Besides, the whole world was Hope's to choose from, and she had only Stephen. Just as you have sometimes seen a dull, smouldering fire blaze out, so the woman's nature burst its ordinary bonds.

"Yes," she said hoarsely, "he did everything because he knew whose hand brought you where you were. He owed you something, Hope Vennard! Your loss was his gain, and now he seeks to make it up in this fashion. God will not let him, I tell you. It is Stephen who is wild!"

A horrible fear flashed over Hope. The room spun

round, and lightning sparks danced before her eyes. The debt Stephen owed, the sin he had committed, the mystery concerning her father's death, and the strict charge Joe had given her, so long ago, never to mention it — his secret, that could not be confessed to her —

"Joe," — Hope knelt at her feet and clasped her hands again, — "I *must* hear it now. If you have any pity, tell me the truth. What does Stephen know of my father's death?"

"All," Joe responded, with a fierce, sullen desperation.

"O, no, not *all*;" and Hope's voice was hysterical. "Why, think a little, Joe; it was murder! Would Stephen witness such a deed, and let the miscreant go unpunished? No, you are mistaken."

"Life was sweet to him," Joe said, looking into the fire.

"O, Joe!" It was the wail of a heart rent asunder. And then there was an awful, deathly silence.

Presently Hope rose. Her face was icily white and cold. A blue line for the rosy lips Stephen had kissed last night. Her whole figure took on a rigidity as if she had been frozen.

"Joe," — her voice was strangely hollow, — "I want you to tell me the whole truth. I promised to trust him, and it is basely wicked to break my word; but the silence, and waiting, will kill me. God knows I forgive him. I think he has suffered bitterly, and repented

deeply for any evil moment of passionate anger. Begin."

"I can't." Joe writhed in sickly fear.

"You shall, Josephine Dane. Either this, or take back the charge you have made, and let me have Stephen, my own love, once again."

She transfixed Joe with her resolute eye. As if under the influence of some strange spell, she told all she knew. Her sincerity impressed Hope powerfully. And yet no sound escaped her lips as the story ended. She was stunned.

"You couldn't marry him?" Joe said.

"No, O, no! Poor Stephen. Joe, did you ever hate him?"

"No; I told you I loved him. And if he was in a prison cell, I would find my way to him. No crime could ever taint him in my eyes. And so, I love him better than you."

"O," she moaned, "it is so hard! so cruel! Why did God let him! God is so strong, you know, and has promised to help us in the hour of temptation. Why didn't he cry to Him! You are sure, Joe! You didn't dream this wild, horrible thing!"

Joe Dane had never told a wilful lie in her whole life. It angered her to be doubted or disbelieved. In her way she felt fully as miserable as Hope. All the ache and agony she had borne for years, all the pangs of silent endurance, the coldly treated love, the hope

trampled in the dust, a pale corse despoiled of its beauty, the wasted youth and the irrepressible longing, joining in one mighty throe, burst the bonds of the slow-travailing soul asunder. She sprang up, and leaned her elbow on the low marble mantel, to steady herself.

"Do you suppose I *liked* to believe such a thing of the man I loved? Do you think it was nothing to have this terrible secret weighing upon me, and yet bear it gladly for his sake? I am not beautiful, like you; I can't take on the graces that make you so winsome; I haven't your soft voice, nor your sweet eyes. But I am a woman, and can love."

"Poor Joe!" Hope came up to her, and laid her trembling hand on the broad shoulder. "Yes, you have suffered the most, and you have the best right to him. There'll be one blessed night for me to remember. And when I am gone, you and Stephen will settle into your old ways, growing tenderer to each other. No one will ever come between you again, for his heart is all yours, save the little corner I crept into. Don't turn me quite out, Joe. For I shall like to think of you both when I am away, and cannot see you;" and Hope's quivering voice broke down.

"Going away?" Joe exclaimed, in a dazed, wondering manner. "Where can you go?"

"I must; I must. Think—if it had been your father—and the man you loved! You couldn't take his poor hand, knowing the stain there was upon it; and you

would rather go away and break your own heart, than stay and wound his by coldness. And I think it would pain him terribly to know we had talked this over."

"O!" and Joe wrung her hands. "What have I done? Why did you make me tell the story, Hope?"

"It is all right and best. What if I had learned it after I was his — wife;" and she shuddered. "But if I *could* stay, we might betray our secret. I haven't your reticence. Some time, when he questioned me closely, I should be compelled to tell him. I forgive him now. Poor Stephen! It has been a hard burden for him to carry. But"—and her voice faltered,— "I don't know how I could see him again."

"I ought not to have told you!" Joe was struck with a latent remorse. In this tangled path she had lost her way.

"No; as I said, it is all right. It won't kill me now, for I am young and strong; and I think God meant that I should know it just at this time. He wasn't *quite* sure that it would be wisest for us to marry. I can answer him now, without any difficulty."

The sad, patient face and dreary voice smote Joe bitterly. Yet jealous love and a certain rugged feeling of right upheld her.

They stood there, looking at each other in dumb anguish, for the sake of the man they both loved. Fate

ties hard and troublesome knots in her webs now and then.

"You see it will be best for me to go."

"But where? There's Mr. Adams —"

"No, not there." Another shiver came over Hope. "It must be quite among strangers, and where he will not find me. A little while ago, Joe, I could have gone away with an Opera Troupe; a gentleman liked my voice so very much. So I can sing and teach music. Stephen has made me able to take care of myself. I can't tell now what I shall do — but something. God will help me."

"Hope," Joe said, much moved, "when Stephen returns it will be like the brothers going back without Benjamin. How shall I meet him? He will hate and despise me for what I have done. Yet I think he was wrong. I can't seem to make it fair to my mind. It's like seething a kid in its mother's milk."

"Yes." Hope's pale lips quivered. "We'll talk of it to-morrow. Good night, Joe. I feel tired — sick."

"Good night;" and the two women kissed each other.

Then Hope crept off up stairs. It seemed at first as if her feet would refuse to carry her. She did not even get a light, but in the darkness and silence found her way into bed, and lay there shivering and exhausted. It had been such a great blow. To lose confidence in Stephen, to think of the fearful crime he had committed for that paltry sum of money! And how he had grown

rich — She wanted to believe it an accident, but her whole nature seemed to revolt against this, much as she loved and pitied Stephen. And that he could have taken her to his heart!

She did not sleep at all. Nearly all night she lay with her eyes wide open. After midnight the moon came up and flooded the room with its cold, pale light. Sometimes a fiery flash of fever tortured her, then a chill, that nearly froze the blood in her veins. It seemed to her she lived ages in that one night.

Joe sat by the fire. In her confused and wandering way she was trying to unravel the tangled web, and see who was right. Just now she loved Stephen with a sort of tigerish fierceness. To see another woman his, to have him lavish caresses upon her, to be put aside completely, was what she could not endure. Pity her, too. Life is so hard to some of us, and love is cruel.

Two very strange days passed over them. They made talk of common occurrences; they went through with their ordinary duties; but one subject was not touched upon. They avoided each other's eyes, and somehow both came to have a guilty feeling, as if they were about some crime.

On the third day Hope did not go to school as usual. At ten, after spending an hour in her room, she came down in her thick gray dress. There was a stony, settled expression in her face, a sinking of the lines about the mouth, and a dark shade under the eyes. Even her voice had changed.

"Joe," she began, with a hollow, tremulous sound, "are you well enough to go out for a walk? It's a lovely day."

It was bright and sunny.

"I could." Joe glanced up wistfully. "Why?"

"Don't ask me any questions, please. It is best for you not to know anything. Don't tell Stephen of our talk. Comfort him all you can, and make him forget me. And now put on your bonnet and go out for an hour. Just let me kiss you once. You have been so kind to me! I want you to forgive me for all the pain and suffering I've caused you. I know now what it is."

But the kiss ended in sobs. Since that fatal night Hope had been too deeply stunned for tears. They both wept.

"O, Hope," — Joe's voice was broken and repentant, — "stay. Don't go. I'll give up all claim on Stephen. He may love you; he may devote his whole life to you, and I'll look on, never saying a word. Only stay."

"It isn't that, Joe. It's the insurmountable barrier God placed between us. I should make Stephen miserable if I staid."

"But what will you do?"

"It is best you should not know. At present I am provided for. I shall never do anything for which you or Stephen would be sorry. I cannot tell you more than that. Now you must go."

Joe gave her a wild, beseeching look. Hope was the

stronger. She brought Joe's shawl and bonnet, wrapped her with tender care, led her through the hall, and gave her one convulsive kiss. When the door closed, Hope groped her way back as if she had been blind. For a moment the whole sacrifice appeared useless. And then the room seemed to run with seas of crimson blood. A sick shudder crept over her.

Presently, a hackman drove up to the door. Katy came in wide-eyed wonder.

"You're not goin' away, Miss Hope?"

"Yes. I want you to give this to Miss Joe, and this to Mr. Dane when he comes home," and she handed her a little packet.

"You'm not goin' to 'lope?" and Katy started in affright.

The man had brought down her trunk. She gave Katy's black hand a fond, lingering squeeze, uttered a broken good-by, and before Katy could recover herself, the hack dashed away. She went back to the kitchen, talking out her astonishment with herself.

On Joe's return, she brought the two notes; but Joe was in no condition to talk. Now that the step had been taken, a wild consternation filled every pulse. She looked helplessly at Katy; she stretched out her hands in a strange terror; the whole world seemed drifting away. She tried to call on Hope, on Stephen, but her tongue was paralyzed. And then came darkness, peace.

Stephen's business being ended sooner than he expected, he hurried home, eager to see Hope, his brain filled with delicious visions. He found Joe in the stupor of fever, quite unconscious, and a note from Hope that gave him a shock half depriving him of his faculties. He had found Joe's also, and read it. Hope had worded it so carefully that no one could have suspected Joe of being aware of her intentions.

To Stephen she said she had been studying her own heart, and found that becoming his wife was an impossibility. She was sorry for having misled him, but she had not then known her true feelings. She begged him to forget her—she was not worth his remembrance. He had performed a more than friend's duty towards her, and she implored him to believe her grateful. It would be useless to search for her, she said, as, if he found her, a return would be quite out of the question. The whole tone of the note was curt and cold. It pained Stephen cruelly. That to Joe was so tender!

Poor Hope! Her heart had well nigh broken over them both. If she had said to Stephen half of what she longed to, she could never have gone away. In her rare delicacy she could not humiliate him by even hinting at his secret. And so she had guarded every word, been cold when her whole soul was overflowing with love, precise and formal when every nerve was in a wild rack of anguish. More than once she had paused in the

writing, and believed herself unable to proceed, until an inexorable fate goaded her on.

For a fortnight Josephine Dane's senses were closed to all outward events. Occasionally she was restless; but then she would only wring her hands and exclaim in pathetic tones, "O, dear! O, dear!" The rest of the time she lay in a stupor, taking what they gave her, but never returning the least sign of recognition. Stephen watched over her with a strange, yearning love, such as one gives to a helpless child. And for some reason he was doubly anxious to have her live.

What the soul passed through in that time poor Joe never remembered, and perhaps it was as well. There are some awful secrets in nature that it is not wise to penetrate. A confused, troublous pain was all the impression she had, until one day she opened her eyes, sadly weak, but with a clear vision. This was her room. By degrees the furniture grew familiar. Opposite there, by the window, sat a placid woman, past middle life, her soft brown hair gathered under a plain cap, her face sweet and patient. She was sewing slowly, pausing now and then to glance out on the street. Through the window floated a quivering haze of golden sunshine. Beyond, the blue sky bounded all.

Joe drew a long breath. So heavenly peaceful! If she could lie there forever at rest — but she had a vague idea that there was something else to her life. A pain and dreariness, a want that could not be satisfied.

Then she wondered how it would be to die. Was God as kind and pitiful as they said? Did He take poor, wearied souls in His arms, and whisper over them some words of everlasting peace? For life was thorny. Rose-lined paths were but for few. None had ever blossomed in her way. And then she asked the vague question we all ask at some time, why she had been born at all.

Presently old memories began to throng about her. Had Hope come from school yet? Ah! what was this sharp pang? Was Hope going away? What did they say that night? Perhaps Stephen had found her.

By degrees Joe recalled all, just as if she had fallen asleep yesterday, and wakened this morning. The sun was going over westward; so it could not be morning. And why was this strange woman here?

She saw the light fading out, but asked no question. She did not even stir, until a step in the hall roused her. A light tap at the door, which was opened immediately afterwards, and some one came to her bedside. The woman by the window rose, and put aside her sewing.

Joe held out her hand, though, for the weak tears in her eyes, she could not see. But through her pale lips trembled the word, "Stephen!"

"Dear Joe!" He bent over and kissed her tenderly.

"How long have I been sick?" she asked.

"Nearly three weeks. But you are improving now; have been for several days."

"Have you found *her*, Stephen?"

There was a convulsive pressure of Joe's hand, and the strong man swayed almost as if he would have fallen.

"I have not searched."

"Why?" A mortal terror seized Joe.

"Some day you shall know. It was her own wish. You are too weak to be excited by it now."

"No. What did you think?"

"Katy suggested, — it was wild, I know; but did you ever dream she cared for some one, — that she went away with him?"

Should she let him believe it?

"You had no quarrel? But I need not ask. I saw her note to you. And Katy told me she went in your absence. We must learn to do without her, though God knows we shall miss her sorely."

"Are you talking to her?" interposed the nurse.

"She has recognized me, Mrs. Beswick. She is really better."

"The doctor, you know, was afraid of excitement."

"It will not injure me. I shall get well."

Stephen noticed how inexpressibly dreary the tone was, how utterly devoid of hope; and it pained him to the heart. They must be more to each other now, since

the one who could have been so much to both was gone.

Joe recovered slowly. April came up with her bland airs and wooing sunshine. A faint suggestion of southern bloom stealing through the lattice, trees swelling with their buds, and a stray bird now and then piping his lay in a tender voice. What cared she for them all? What was bird, or bee, or sunshine to her?

Never had Stephen been so tender. It might be love, but not the kind that dwelt in his sad eyes, dimly shadowed forth, for another. She remembered many springs ago, when this fear had first seized her, — how she had watched that shady light come and go, and learned too surely that he was drifting away from her. Why had she not ceased to love him? ah, why? When God made a woman's heart hungry for love, did he mean it should go forever unsatisfied?

By degrees matters resumed their olden course. Mrs. Beswick went away; Joe was able to go up and down stairs, to ride out, and indulge in an occasional walk. Katy petted and scolded her as if she were a child. She seemed so weak and dependent now that she was glad to have some one stronger, on whom she could lean.

The first surprise and grief occasioned by Hope's departure had worn off. Katy was garrulous, to be sure, and from her Joe learned all that she had missed of Stephen's sorrow. The fond old servant was loud in

her lamentations, and stubborn in her faith that Hope had gone off with some gallant young lover. Joe feebly said, "I don't think it, Katy. No one ever came to the house that she seemed interested in, or for whom she cared." But Katy still persisted. She had imbued Stephen with this belief, because there was no other that could account so well, not only for the young girl's departure, as for the coldness of her note. Joe's dangerous illness at this period had roused his fears and sympathies in another direction, and perhaps prevented his yielding to the passionate grief that might otherwise have absorbed him.

The shock had brought him back to his olden self—caused him to think of all that lay between. Had he any real right to Hope's love? Was there not a curse upon his very life, a stain that could never be washed away? She did not know this; but all unconsciously she had become an avenger in the hands of God. And since he could not contest this judgment, Stephen Dane bowed his head.

XI.

SAD HEARTS.

A SLOW-PASSING summer full of sweets. A quiet house, just as if some one had been carried forth for burial. A yearning and a longing for a presence that came not — never would again, they both said, fearfully, to themselves.

They had fallen into a strange manner of living. Both were reserved, though not from any feeling of pride or selfishness. Indeed, it was a peculiar state, brought about by a peculiar combination. No explanation had ever passed between them. It may appear strange, yet you will sometimes know of two people living together through months of silence, because the right moment passed without the needed words being spoken, and no other ever came.

Stephen fancied at first that Joe might know more of Hope's heart than he had learned. But all mention of her departure distressed Joe so greatly, that, from natural kindliness, he resolved to avoid it. Each day it seemed to her she was growing more positively afraid

of Stephen. She understood, in a vague way, that it was Hope who had drawn them nearer together, who had rounded the sharp points of each nature, and softened the asperities, rendering home such a bright, enchanting place. There was no one now to make them laugh with gay little sallies; no one to sing through summer twilights; no soft arms to steal around her neck, the little hands clasping to make a rest for her chin. "Dear Joe, you are so kind!" How many times she had heard the words! Nothing now to break this chilling, awful dread that threw its shadow over the house.

If Joe had recovered her full strength and sturdiness; if she could have gone to the stores and to market; cheapened tradesmen and scolded huckster women; swept the house and weeded the garden, — she might have regained her spirits in some degree. Instead, everything was a burden. She was glad to have Katy relieve her. Some mornings she felt so weary that she did not come down until after Stephen had breakfasted and gone. Then she idled about, dusting the library and parlor, sat down by the open windows, and gazed vacantly at the far-off, luminous sky. Was there One there who knew what she needed, and would take pity on her? She was so tired with this endless, tangled mass of thought. She was so pained with Stephen's sad face. If she had not told Hope!

Consequently, after the first improvement, she fell

into a hopeless, apathetical state, growing thinner and paler, and so unlike the Joe of other days. Stephen took her to the sea-side ; the air was too strong, and made her cough ; then to pretty inland resorts ; but nothing roused her. She was no great lover of nature ; she had few resources of her own for such a period as this. At times even Stephen's generous care fretted her, and she was cold and ungracious, when her heart was almost breaking with pity and remorse.

And Stephen, unable to read her heart, bore patiently with her, his own heavy enough. There was with him no lack of subjects for thought. Almost daily he went over the past, looking at its blackness, its foul deeds, and abhorring himself in the deepest humiliation. Yet where could he have made one step different ? A strange fate had led him on, had compelled him, as it were, to bear other burdens than his own. But the most painful of all to him was his utter inability to make restitution. He fancied at times, because he had dared to love Hope, God had set this seal upon his punishment — never to know how she fared, or what she might be called upon to suffer. He fairly hated the gold that flowed in upon him so lavishly. He dispensed it with so free a hand that friends were filled with wonder.

He had made some effort to find Hope, in spite of her request. Not to see her, but to make over to her the portion that was so truly hers. He had supposed she would go to New York, but all search there proved

fruitless. So there was nothing but endurance, and that is always doubly hard when the light of faith has died out, as it had with him.

As I said, it was a dreary summer, for all its bloom, and richness, and the variety Stephen was fain to give it. Sometimes it almost seemed to him as if Joe moped in sullen perverseness, and it was difficult to preserve his own equanimity.

A woman with a different nature could not have hidden her secret so effectually. I question if Joe could, under other circumstances. There were times when she resolved to tell Stephen; but in their more confidential moments, some wretched indecision held her back. For there was to Joe a strange, awful fear, that chilled her very soul, an almost presentiment if you will, that in a little time neither love nor hate would matter much to her.

One August afternoon she went out for a ramble. The air in the house seemed stifling her; the quiet street, with its infrequent passengers, was lonelier than a desert. The air had been cooled by a shower the preceding evening, and was fresh and fragrant with the peculiar ripeness of the later summer. Chirping birds, droning bees, and bright winged flies flitted about. A pleasant river sound broke on her ear from the not distant Schuylkill. Boats skimming the water — the plash of oars, or the whirl of a brisk little wheel, scattering the spray in every direction. How often she and Hope had sat on the deck, and watched the green shores as they glided by!

A sound broke on her ear — the toll of a bell. Slow and solemn, falling on this clear air, and being carried inconceivable distances, dying sadly out at length over the river. Was some human soul passing over another river? If a day came when the bells should toll in this manner for her?

Joe shuddered. We all cling to life, and are filled with dread in such moments as these, when the awful realities are thrust before our vision.

Turning a corner, she saw at the end of the street a little chapel. She had heard of the place, but had never been there. The street was shady and cool; so she wandered on, listening to the slow sound, and thinking some vague and troubled thoughts. A few persons entered the churchyard gate from time to time; then the hearse and carriages came up, and Joe quickened her pace.

The clergyman walked down the aisle in his white robe — a young man with a reverent air. His rich, deep voice broke the solemn stillness with that most glorious of all passages from Holy Writ, —

"I am the resurrection and the life."

Was it the tone, or the words, or the scene? Josephine Dane fell on her knees in the obscure corner she had slipped into, and remained there all through the service. She was not weeping, although she strained her fingers so tightly over her eyes; she was hardly listening. She heard the words like one in a dream,

and was guided more by the impression they made upon her, than any distinct power inherent in them. A woman this was, for whom the burial service was being said. Husband and children were there. A happy woman, a woman beloved. O, why had not God taken her instead? Of what avail was her poor, starved, miserable life!

The clergyman headed the procession again as it moved out of church. Such a kindly, pitying face! If it would turn once upon her!

It did — a brief glance, a sort of startled, questioning look. And then Joe bowed her head again until they had all passed, and the last footfall died away on the gravel path outside. She was so weak and weary, it seemed at first as if she could never get home again.

It was quite late, and Stephen sat on the porch, under the swinging vines.

"Joe," he said, softly, "you have walked too far."

His tone unnerved her. She tottered a little, but he caught her in his arms — held her there a moment while a sort of convulsive sob shook her.

"Poor Joe! If I could do anything to make you well and happy! You have never been like yourself since *she* went away."

He had scarcely uttered Hope's name since her departure.

There had been a time when one word from Stephen Dane could have made Joe both well and happy. Now

it was too late. Only God's cure for burdened souls could ever bring peace to hers.

It is so strange to come upon one day in our lives when we begin to feel the things of earth slipping away, and cease to care. We hold ourselves almost in awe.

"No," Joe repeated, vacantly, "I have never been myself since then."

"If I could find her — for your sake."

"For your own, Stephen. I shall not need any one long."

A wandering color flushed his face, and his whole frame quivered.

"You are low spirited, Joe. But you are not recovering, as I hoped. If I could find her! She is another's perhaps, but she would come to you."

"She is *not* another's, I know. I sent her away. Look at me and hate me, Stephen!"

Joe's tone was desperate. There was a fixed and stony expression in her eye.

"You are mistaken. If she had cared to stay, if — O, Joe! I loved her! She knew it. That sent her away. My cruel impatience, my mad, fatal passion! Strange that the highest and holiest feeling of our nature should rise up and become a curse — torment us with unavailing regrets. You don't know anything about it, Joe, thank God!"

"Don't I!" Her voice was hoarse and tremulous, and she broke away from his clasp. "What have you

and she realized of its torments! I think if any man had loved me, had held me in his arms, had said the words you did to her, given me the kisses, I could defy all that would come afterwards. To love without these — that is where it stings, Stephen!"

He glanced at her in amazement. A dim truth pierced his brain. Far back in the past — in another and distant life, he had indulged in a boyish fancy for Joe — association mostly. Did God mean to curse him on every hand, drag all these old things and thoughts to light as a punishment? Did he owe this girl a debt that could be paid only in one way?

"Joe," — his voice broken with infinite sorrow, — "if I have sinned against you, can nothing make amends?"

"O, Stephen! I don't mean that now. Whatever I may have dreamed in that old, foolish time, my eyes are clear to-day. You have given me all the love that was in your heart for me. God made her beautiful and wise, me plain and ignorant. I know there are corners in your heart that I could never have filled, true wife as I might have been to you. Somewhere you outgrew me. It isn't so much the name, or the right, — it is the fitness, the consciousness of perfect possession."

"Where have you learned all this, Joe?" for he was startled at the light in her deep, sad eyes.

"I cannot tell you. It has been coming by slow degrees. May be, as we go on to the other country, we see more clearly."

Stephen clasped the bowed figure to his heart. There was a struggle with the tears in his voice, as he said, —

"Heaven knows, Joe, I have always given you a brother's love. And wherein I have sinned, God has punished me sorely. I had no right to dream of *her*."

"No." Joe raised her head and faced him steadily. "I told her so that night. That was why she went away. She could not stay and be *nothing* to you. I think her nature was too high and fine ever to upbraid you by a look. I was wild and jealous, tortured by fierce passions; but I would have fought it out by myself if I had not known your secret."

She was brave enough now. The burden she had carried for him she laid down at last at his feet.

"*What* do you know?" His face was deathly white, his hands trembled, his strong frame shook as with an aguish chill, and the words shivered through his pale lips in gasps. "That horrible secret! And you have kept silence all these years!"

She knelt before him. She clasped his knees with her weak hands, and moaned, —

"I would have borne more than that for your sake, Stephen. Open shame and disgrace could not have estranged me!"

"And I was a coward! But O, Joe, you don't know how hard it was! It seemed as if God put his poor, weak life into my hands; and then he was my father, too! The sins of the fathers are to be visited upon the

children, and so they come to me, to her. Is there no end to God's judgments?"

If Joe had been pale before, a deadly terror crept over her face now, making it ghastly. Her eyes stared in a wild, wandering manner, for there came into her mind a thought that tortured her like a thousand demons. What if all this while Stephen had been more sinned against than sinning? She crouched in a shapeless mass there on the step; she stretched out her hands imploringly, and cried, —

"Tell me who struck the fatal blow, Stephen — not you?"

"My God, Joe! Did you believe that? Did you tell *her*?"

The eyelids sank together, the whole frame lapsed into lifelessness, but the look of passionate pleading still remained.

Stephen Dane had the weaknesses of humanity. The hot, indignant flash of conscious innocence, so deeply wronged, so outraged, came first. And then her love — the words she had said — "Open shame and disgrace could not have estranged me" — pleaded powerfully for poor Joe. He stooped and gathered her in his arms; he carried her to her room and laid her tenderly on the bed, chafing the cold hands.

She opened her eyes in a feeble, bewildered manner, shrinking as they met his, and cowering in abject terror.

He stooped and kissed her, forgiving her fully and freely. Had it been as she thought, her silence would have proved her rare, exceeding devotion.

"Dear Joe," he whispered, "there is no stain of blood on my hand. I hated the man bitterly, but it never came to that. His meanness and injustice exasperated me, and some angry words passed between us. I grudged him his gold, but never his life."

"It was uncle Archy. O, Stephen! And the horrible dream has ended. They are both in their graves."

"Yes. And, since we have come to it, let me justify myself a little, Joe." And then he told her how he had been discharged that fatal afternoon, and gone to the woods; how he had heard the sullen plash in the water, and upon reaching the spot had erased that one trace of crime; his finding the money; his fears and resolves; his final determination that he at least would not drag the poor old man to justice. Holding her hand all the while, when, in her utter self-abasement, she would have drawn it away.

"And that I should have believed it against you!" she moaned.

"It puzzles me how you could have suspected at first."

"I will tell you. When I am gone, Stephen, I want you to forget me. I am not worthy of the least remembrance. Yet I think no crime would ever have blackened you in my eyes."

"Must I be less generous than you, Joe?"

Her eyes filled with tears. What a poor, ignorant heathen she had been in those old times! For now her pale cheek was stained with conscious shame as she detailed how she had come in possession of his secret. It appeared so mean and unworthy of any womanhood!

He strove to comfort her. It was a proof of his own generosity that he could put by the fierce and bitter pang tearing his heart, as he remembered Hope had listened to this story, and become homeless through its influence. He crowded down his agony, and made his voice both strong and tender for her sake. For there was something exceedingly sad and touching in all this devotion; he could see she had not acted wholly from selfish motives. Her strong sense of right, though less fine in its perceptions than that of many others, shrank from so abhorrent a union as she believed this would be.

The supper-bell rang, and Stephen went down alone. He was glad to send Katy to Joe, and, leaning his brow upon his hand, left his cup of tea untasted. He was not conscious of any physical want. His brain was busy with the strange path wherein he had walked, so full of mistakes and misunderstandings. Was God really watching over him, and giving him those things that were best for him? A bleak, barren, desolate life! The prosperity he had craved, the wealth and the ambitions he had so madly longed for, answered sharp, and turned into a curse! What if he had gone on with that

old, simple life in Tregony, married Joe, reared up children whose needs would be simply those of the body? Would he have been better, happier?

O, no, no! He was blind still, and could not see clearly into God's designs. These pure longings, these high ambitions, that were not, after all, perverted to mere selfish uses, meant something. God knew when he placed them there. And when any soul rose out of its slough, and took upon it a new form, came nearer to the All-wise, surely he saw and cared for it, pitied its griefs and pardoned its mistakes. Some day he should know. He held fast by his faith. Bruised and wounded, agonizing in keenest pain, he would still believe in the God who had brought him thus far through the wilderness.

He could see wherein he had failed with Hope. He should have told her the truth. It was not his hand that had placed a bar between. But he had been afraid. His coward soul had shrunk from the thought of losing her, the one thing his heart craved. And God, through other agencies, had taken her away. Her soul was too pure and high to mate with anything so stained and worn as his.

He went out and walked up and down the garden-path. One duty was before him, one chance of restitution still remained. He could make Joe's short life blessed beyond compare to her. I will confess to you that he shrank a little from the sacrifice at first. Hope

Vennard was the only woman he had cared to call his, and failing in that, he desired to keep his whole life sacred to her. Yet Joe's confession effectually precluded any lingering dreams. If she *could* have forgiven, she would not have penned those cold words — the last remembrance of her presence that was to greet his eyes. Some lurking tenderness would have betrayed itself. Therefore, if he should ever find her, all that past must be a sealed book. He would never speak of it again.

I cannot describe to you the struggle in the man's mind. But the nobler part of his nature conquered — and there was much that was grand in Stephen Dane. His resolve once taken, he would not flinch.

Katy had cried over Joe's white face, and her inability to eat. She had undressed her, and arranged her pillows with tender care; and though, when she returned to her kitchen, Joe's wistful eyes followed her, the poor girl would not beg for Stephen. Unwittingly she had worked him misery enough.

He came at length. The young moon was climbing over fleecy drifts that melted into blue. Up in the hollow of the luminous sky great stars pulsed and throbbed, beating out the giant heart of Nature. Soft airs stole in through the open window, dewy sweetnesss from river and mead, finding their way through the city.

Joe held out her trembling hand. "Forgive it all, Stephen," she said, softly. "I shall not be here long.

After that, I want you to find *her*, and tell her how I sinned against you both."

"Joe," — his voice was solemn and tender, — "we have all made mistakes. I, too, have sinned. I have been blind and proud. But if my love will comfort you, it is all yours now."

"No." There was a little thrill of delight in her voice, too. "I don't want it *all*, Stephen. The old, jealous torture has died away, and I am coming to peace, rest. I am not ungrateful, nor ruled by any mean, sullen spirit. Heaven knows I ought to have done with all such now. And I take my share of your love gladly."

"Which must be all, Joe. Let me make amends for the past, wherein I have made you suffer. Until God separates us —"

She guessed what he would have said, for her woman's intuition had been quickened. She placed her hand gently over his lips.

"No, Stephen. Hope's place must be kept sacred, if she never comes to fill it. But she will. And having your love, I am content."

"You don't quite understand it," he said, gently. "When I told my love, I did not dare repeat the story. I had a misgiving of the shock it would cause her. God did not mean that she should be mine."

"We don't know what God means until it comes. We have only to wait. I told you before that I could

not fill your heart, and a name was nothing. But you are princely generous, Stephen."

"Will you take the gift?"

"No," softly and tearfully. "Only love me to the end."

They clasped hands in the silence, coming nearer to each other then than ever before in their whole lives. And both hearts yearned for the absent one.

Far into the night Stephen Dane sat and watched his cousin. When the wind died down he fanned her gently, and with tenderest hands put aside the heavy hair clustering about her temples. Poor Joe, how hard life had been with her!

The next day Stephen consulted an eminent physician. It was, as he had feared, too late for recovery. But Joe no longer cared for life.

The shock and her remorse made fearful inroads upon her enfeebled frame. She amended a little, so that she came down stairs, and walked about the garden. Every day Stephen took her to drive. Such lovely haunts as he found, full of the later summer's greenery and fragrance! Rambles through quiet lanes, or by the winding river; tender talks, for there was nothing withheld now. It seemed to Joe as if she was entering heaven almost before her time.

As the days wore on, an odd wish came to her. She wanted to see the clergyman who had read the funeral service that had so deeply impressed her. Stephen

found him easily — a Mr. Leighton, a stranger in the place, who had been at his post barely two months.

A very curious mood took possession of Joe on this afternoon. She begged Katy to braid her hair as Hope used, and wreath stems of Madeira blossoms in it. Her snowy wrapper was as faultless as Katy's fond care could make it, and the loving heart insisted upon her being adorned with a knot of scarlet ribbon at her throat — "Jest as dear Miss Hope used to fix it."

Joe sighed.

"I 'clare, Miss Joe, you look handsome as a picture'!"

The coming death was giving her a strange beauty. The features were large and irregular, but the eyes held in them a wonderful light; the skin was transparent, with a slight fever flush on the cheeks. She had subsided into a languor of movement that was grace, compared with her former abruptness, and her voice had grown low and soft. Sitting in an easy-chair by the open window, she watched the vines swaying idly in the light air, until Katy announced, —

"Mr. Leighton."

The young man paused an instant, then walked directly over to her, holding out his hand frankly.

"Do not rise," he said in the tone she recognized so well. "I am glad to find you able to enjoy this lovely day. Have I not seen you before?"

"I was at the chapel nearly a month ago, at a funeral," she answered.

"Yes, I remember now. You were kneeling, and your paleness attracted me. I was a stranger, and hardly knew the congregation."

"I don't know why I went that day; I was very wretched. Something in your voice soothed me, and I wanted to hear you talk again."

"Thank you." He glanced away from her for a moment to a picture in an oval frame, hanging in the recess by the chimney. It was an exquisite ivorytype of Hope. She noted the direction of his eyes, and glanced also.

"Is she not lovely?" Joe asked involuntarily.

He rose and approached nearer. "Yes," he answered. "I think I met her in Baltimore—a Miss Hope Forsyth, is it not?"

The room whirled round to Joe's dazed brain. Hope so near! Hope given back to Stephen! O, no! she must be dreaming.

"Pardon me," he began, surprised at her agitation; but Joe interrupted him with an eager, tremulous voice, —

"You have seen her! Is she alive—safe? Can you find her again for me?"

"If it is the lady I mean —"

"When did you see her?"

"First in April. I was assistant at a church in

Baltimore. She came to stay with Dr. Cutter; at least, that is where I met her. But I heard her sing in church, one morning, and such a glorious voice one never forgets;" and Mr. Leighton's eyes wandered absently out on the porch, his memory returning, as it often did, to Hope Forsyth.

"O Hope! my darling, my darling!" Joe rocked herself to and fro, and repeated the words softly, while Mr. Leighton, strangely puzzled, glanced from her to the picture.

"Can you find her for me?" The tone and face were alike sharp and eager.

"I don't understand—"

"No; how should you?" Joe made a long pause to collect her scattered thoughts. What should she tell this stranger?

"She was the ward of my cousin—Mr. Stephen Dane—a sacred charge to him. I sent her away; God forgive me! I had something else to tell you—to ask you. There was a tender pity in your voice that day at the funeral. I've dreamed of it so often! I felt that I wanted some one to be just so tender and pitiful to me, for the way is thorny and tangled, and I cannot find any straight path. It will not be long before I'm done with it all."

"If I can help you—try me, be frank with me. We stumble over so many hard things in life!"

The voice found its way to her heart. For a mo-

ment she struggled with tears; then, steadying her tone, she resumed:—

"I cannot tell you all to-day. I can only think of *her*. I owe her some reparation. I love her as no one ever loved a sister — as a child that one could give one's life for. There was a strange, terrible mistake. I told her what was not true, though Heaven knows I believed it at the time. It sent her away — broke her heart, may be. And now I can't die without her. Will you go for her?"

The incoherent and agitated manner puzzled Mr. Leighton exceedingly. Was the woman *quite* sane?

As if she read his thoughts, she clasped her hands imploringly. The pain and weakness, hidden before, came out in her face. The deep, sad eyes moved him powerfully.

"Anything," he said. "Command me to the uttermost. But if you could explain this a little to me, — give me some message to *her*, — I would go gladly."

The excitement imparted to Joe both courage and strength. With a delicacy one would hardly have given her credit for, she managed to make Mr. Leighton understand all of the story that was necessary. The faltering voice and slow tears impressed him with the truth of the misunderstanding, as well as her sincerity. And during his three months' acquaintance with Hope Forsyth, he had dimly guessed at some hidden sorrow.

After this Joe was in no mood to talk about herself. He saw it, and wisely forbore pressing the subject that he knew well must be so near. She was to write a letter for him to take, and he was to add to it, if need be, his urgent entreaties. And then he left her.

Poor Joe! Never in her life had she written a letter. This was scrawled in a trembling hand, and blotted by many tears. More than once heart and strength seemed failing. In her extremity she called upon the God who ever lends a willing ear. If she could but restore Hope to Stephen — that was all she asked now.

The excitement told fearfully upon her. Katy had gone with the note to Mr. Leighton, who was to start that evening, and Stephen found her alone, so prostrated that he was alarmed.

But in answer to his fears and entreaties, she only said, —

“I shall be better to-morrow.”

XII.

JOE'S ATONEMENT.

THERE was no sleep for Josephine Dane that night. Stephen insisted upon watching her until after midnight, resolving that on the morrow Mrs. Beswick should be recalled. She lay very still, the large eyes strained up to the ceiling, and scarcely moving. But there was something awesome about her, as there is to every human soul wavering on the shores of eternity. His conscience was very tender, too. He thought how he might have blessed this poor life, so barren otherwise. Had he indeed pricked himself with near thorns, in reaching for the far roses, not for him, alas!

She listened to his breathing, slow and strong — the full pulses of manhood. She wondered what was in his heart — if she could but crawl in and see! Tomorrow night the woman he loved would be here. She almost longed to tell him now, but dared not, some subtle fear holding her back, as if the promised

good was safer in secrecy — a childish whim which we have all indulged.

At length he kissed her tenderly, and went away : it was her wish. Then she waited in the silence, wondering how it would be at that last hour. Did God take poor, weary souls home to his bosom? She was so tired! She wanted rest. When Hope came back, kissed her, and forgave her, she would be ready to go. It did not seem so terrible here in this soft silence. Just as if God drew nearer with every breath, as if she could trust him, at last, after so many perplexing doubts and fears.

Morning dawned. A damp, odorous air filled the room. Birds came and warbled in the shrubbery. Katy was astir, singing revival melodies, in her round, cheery voice. How many times she had listened to them! Some morning she would sing in a voice broken by sobs — Joe would not be there to hear. How strange to think of everything going on as usual, and she asleep under the ground! Would they miss her? A little, perhaps.

There was a clatter of dishes, a fragrance of warm biscuit, and still the hymn. "Jordan's stormy banks," it was this morning, and Katy's fervor and negro dialect gave it a peculiar interest to the one who was shortly to see the "fields of living green."

Stephen entered, grave and quiet, and studied her curiously. Some great change had come over her.

"I shall go for Mrs. Beswick," he said. "Katy cannot give you the attention you need."

"Not to-day, Stephen," she pleaded.

"Why not to-day?"

"It is my wish. You have spoiled me by indulgence. After to-day you may do as you like. Nay, I am no worse."

"You do not look as if you had slept at all."

Joe only smiled.

Stephen lingered far into the morning, performing many kind little offices with the grace and patience of a woman. Only urgent business took him away at length.

Joe seemed in a strange dream. Would Hope really come back to her? Dying, she had said in her note. O, what if she should not live to see the day close; to look once more into those dear eyes! For now that it was coming so near, she grew almost faithless of the rapture.

Some time after noon she begged Katy to dress her, and carry her down stairs, having made several ineffectual attempts herself. The white wrapper and the scarlet ribbons again.

"Is the minister comin', Miss Joe?" Katy asked.

"Some one will come," Joe answered, faintly, crowding down her precious secret; and Katy was awed by a sense of mystery she could not comprehend.

The lounge was wheeled over to the window, for it

seemed to Joe, every few moments, as if she should stifle. Then she was left alone with Hope's little prayer-book in her hand. There, on the fly-leaf, was written, in a girlish style, "Hope Vennard." Joe kissed the name with reverent humility. O! would she come?

A whole hour to wait. Through the swaying vines were sifted grains of golden sunshine. Troops of quaint shadows played on the wall, grasping each other with rosy fingers. Now and then a gorgeous butterfly settled himself lazily just in sight, or droning bees made the air sleepy with their monotonous hum. In this quiet street, where it was half country, you could hear every passer-by, and Joe listened, with ears warily acute, scarcely daring to breathe. Until she saw Hope, it must appear but a wild dream.

How she lived through that strange hour she could hardly tell. Every sound of carriage wheels, every voice in converse with a companion, thrilled her with feverish anxiety. Her pale lips trembled as she caught her breath. At some moments she believed herself dying, for even the sunlight grew dim, and stars like those of heaven floated before her vision.

Did some one stop? She could not remember clearly. Katy plodding through the hall, and jerking back the night-latch with a sharp click, a scream of surprise, a confusion of voices. Would they never enter? Everything was blurred and indistinct. She seemed floating miles and miles away from all those she had ever known.

A flutter and a fragrance in the atmosphere of the room. A golden light, a sweet, sad pathetic cry, —

"O, Joe! dear, dear Joe!"

Even in her wavering between the two lives, Joe felt the clasp of the soft arms, the rain of tender kisses, tenderer tears; she heard the touching voice, and was content to lie still many moments, steeped in blissful sensations. When she opened her eyes, Hope was looking at her, and they two were alone.

"You will forgive me?" Joe said, softly. "I was wrong. Such a terrible wrong! and to be believed years against one, against him! As soon as I heard where you were, I sent. I could not die in peace without you. Every inch of my flesh, every pulse of my brain and nerves, longed for you. It has been slow starvation."

"If you are glad to have me back, that is enough. For the past, let it go."

"No, it is not enough. Do you think I could have been so selfish, longing to enter heaven's gate, and yet not willing to make all the reparation in my power? And it seems so strange! Just when I was willing to turn to God, he brought me so near you. Stephen searched in New York, he told me."

Hope trembled at the mention of the name, and hid her face on Joe's breast.

"Dear, he loved you so! Now that I have given you back to him, I am quite content to die. You will

forgive him his father's deed — the poor old man did not mean to commit such an awful crime. Why should it be remembered against one so generous and good as Stephen? Surely he has borne enough already."

"O, don't think of that, Joe. When I went away, believing him guilty, I forgave him. Many an hour I have wanted to crawl back, ever so abjectly, and comfort him. I was so sorry for what he had to bear. I tried to fancy him happy in —"

"Not in anything I could give him, Hope. I was wild that night. I was tortured by a hungry fiend. I was willing the whole world should sit in sackcloth, so that I but had his love. And I thought he had no right to yours. O, Hope, why does God give women hearts to love, and then bring only husks to satisfy them? It seems so hard! I wanted some one to be tender to me; I wanted little children to climb my knees, and kiss my lips. God filled me up with human feelings. He did not bestow upon me any beauty to be proud of, any mind to cultivate, any broad views and longings for the good of my fellow-creatures. He made me dark and narrow, and placed just one star in my way, and my weary, trembling feet followed it. Was it so very wrong? I get confused. I can't seem to distinguish clearly. And now He is going to take me home. Will any one love me in heaven?"

Hope was sobbing, her wet face against Joe's.

"When I am gone I don't want you to blame Ste-

phen, or let any thought of this come between your love. He gave me all he could. God made him better and grander. I could have staid in Tregony all my life, and moiled with its dull and uneventful ways. Stephen's soul would have starved. I could not have supplied his wants. I know it now. We don't love people from will, nor duty, only so far as our duty towards them lies. He offered to make me his wife. It was good and noble in him; but I knew well he had never sinned against me. When we were boy and girl there was some childish talk; since then I have been a sister to him. That was the strongest feeling I could create in him. But a man with a great, hungry soul needs some one who will fill it. And you, with your youth, your beauty, your rich, winsome nature — ”

“O, don't, don't, Joe. Every word stabs me like a knife! Your love was better than mine. It lived through all that dark, horrible time; it did not fear disgrace; it was so strong and resolute. And I like it because it had the courage to fight that night. Mine was so weak, it failed at the first blow — a very coward!”

“Is it dead, Hope? Tell me that!” And Joe, raising her face, looked steadily into it.

“Thank God,” she said, softly, “that I have not murdered any one's soul. I shall go to God weak and empty-handed, but not stained with that sin. You love

him still, Hope. It is right. I have brought you back — given you to him again."

"No, Joe. And yet it is not from any fault of yours. He almost told me the story that morning before he asked my love. And I said, blindly and ignorantly enough, that one could forgive, that one could even love, after such an injury. When it came to me, you see I failed miserably. He would never believe me, never trust me again."

"But for my claim you would not have gone away."

"I might."

"No. It was my mistake, my evil passion and jealousy. And I shall not believe myself forgiven until you promise, when the time comes, you will not let any pride, any word that might be said, keep you apart. You will do for your love what I would have done for mine. It is a better and worthier one. Promise!"

"I will," Hope said, "if so be that he should love me again."

"He has never ceased. He will not have to begin."

There was a long silence, broken only by sobs. Presently Joe said, —

"What of all this time, Hope? Where have you been?"

"I made a confidant of one of my teachers. It was not necessary to tell her the whole story, only that there was an urgent reason for my leaving the city with the

utmost secrecy. She had been applied to not a week before for a governess. Dr. Cutter's sister, living on the eastern shore of Maryland, required one. So she sent me to Dr. Cutter. This Mrs. Sayres was expected on a visit; consequently I remained in his family eight or ten days. Their head singer in church was ill, and on Sunday I supplied her place. Once the hymn was — "Guide me, O, thou great Jehovah." I can't tell you how I sang, I felt so weak, so forlorn and desolate, and that was so sweet a prayer. I must have put my whole soul in it. They made me stay. Dr. Cutter thought, with such a voice, I was foolish to do anything but sing. He was so kind, so good! I told him much of my life, and why I wished for quiet, retirement. I had taken the name of Forsyth, fancying that Stephen, knowing my dislike to it, would be less likely to suspect my using it. I was a good deal frightened at first, and lived in daily dread. But by degrees a feeling of safety came. I wanted to think he had forgotten me, and that you were happy. I did not dream of your being ill. You have suffered for me."

"I was sick when you went away. I mended some, but the cough staid. And I wanted you."

"Thank you, dear. It is so good to come back! And that you should have seen Mr. Leighton! How strangely it has all come about. You will get well now, Joe."

"No. It is best. I don't mind. Only if God will hold me in his strong arms at the last, so that I shall not be afraid. His love will make up for all in the other country. And now you must go to your room and rest a little. After that I shall claim you, but it will not be for long."

Hope was glad to go. Her dear old familiar room! Not an article of furniture displaced. Here, in this little drawer, the pearls Stephen had given her. It seemed an age since that happy day when she was seventeen. Every sight brought fresh tears.

Katy had received her orders to send Stephen immediately to Joe, without a word of comment. He was quite late; but at length she heard his step upon the porch, for he generally came up the garden path. He glanced in the window, and then entered.

"You are worse," he said, anxiously, looking at her flushed and swollen face. "You have been crying. O, Joe! you punish me sorely. Why will you not let me make you happy?"

"I am happy now. Tears are not always a sign of misery. I have atoned for that old, black treachery and ingratitude. I have brought Hope back to you, Stephen. She is in this house."

He started, quivering in every nerve. A strange, eager light flashed into his eyes, and then died out.

"Where did you find her? Are you not dreaming?"

Joe steadied her voice to tell the story. There were

long pauses and broken sobs. Stephen's tears fell silently, and his heart went out to this poor girl as it never had before.

"If ever any thought was selfish or wrong, any deed unjust, you have nobly redeemed it all, my poor Joe," he said in answer to her pleading. "If any prayers could restore health and life —"

"No," she interrupted him. "Don't pray for that now. Only love me to the end."

He kissed her with a full heart.

"You will see her first alone?"

"No." Stephen shivered perceptibly. "Here, in this room — when she can come down."

Joe made no further comment. She was learning a rare delicacy.

Katy was despatched for Hope. The bewildered servant could hardly realize she was in the house again, and still Hope Vennard.

She entered tremblingly. Joe hid her face that she might not read any secret. But there was none, or else they did not betray it. Stephen walked up to Hope with a grave, steady step, and held out his hand, simply uttering, —

"I am so glad you have come!"

The dignity that was well nigh coldness restored Hope. She gave him a greeting more self-possessed than one could have expected, though she betrayed traces of her recent agitation.

Was this really Hope? he asked himself after the surprise had subsided. For the girl had merged into a lovely woman. Society, and the fact of her having been cast upon her own resources, had developed her rapidly. She seemed taller and more mature; in every movement an indefinable grace, in every feature a glow, a warmth, a vividness that arrested one, and held him by a magnetic spell. She had gone beyond Stephen with this one bound. Beside her, he felt himself old and worn. Her freshness was like the first dawn; he was wasting into gray twilight. If ever he had dared to dream, it was over now. She was not for him. How had he ever been so blind and weak!

It was strange how soon they fell into their old habits. I think both Hope and Stephen made an effort for Joe's sake. He seemed to glide naturally into those elder-brother ways which made Hope at once at home. He did not touch upon any incident or difference, — he knew Hope and Joe must have had their mutual explanations, and was satisfied. It was too sore a matter for him to talk over at present.

When Stephen carried Joe up to her room that night, Hope went with her.

"I am going to be your nurse now," she said. "I am young and strong, and cannot be easily fatigued."

Joe gave her a grateful smile.

The two girls rested in each other's arms. Joe could not sleep, and Hope did not wish to. Now and

then some tender word passed between them, or a long, lingering kiss.

"Only for a little while," Joe said; but Hope shrank from the end.

Mr. Leighton called the next day. Hope had beautified the little room, for Joe was too ill to rise. There was something saintly growing up in her face, life immortal blossoming in it, to make her meet for the other country.

When Hope would have left the apartment, Joe detained her by a clasp of the hand.

"You have found peace," Mr. Leighton said, in a low tone.

"Yes, and rest. It is so good! Only I don't know whether I dare believe or not. I have been so foolish and ignorant all my life! I could not see the path God made for me until now. I didn't know I needed His love until all others had failed me."

"As many of us do. We trample on thorns that pierce us, never dreaming there is a better way, until, in the midst of our darkness and pain, we cry unto Him, and He shows us the light."

"Yes," she answered, musingly, "there isn't happiness enough for us all here. And to those who sit in the shadow God comes at last."

He knew then that somewhere there had been a void in this woman's life, a hunger and weariness. The large sad eyes, wandering out of the open window to

the soft blue beyond, told a wordless story. And the touching pathos of her words, "There isn't happiness enough for us all here."

"We cannot penetrate God's mysteries," he said with sweet seriousness. "Why some are blessed, and all their days golden ones, why others are made to look on, to see the cup of joy pass by them, and never quench their thirsty lips in the sparkling draught."

"He means it, you think? So that when one goes all through the desert, he is not to look back with weak regrets that he did not take some other path. That God directs our ways?"

"Yes. Many sorrows and needs we bring upon ourselves, but I do not believe all could have been avoided."

"Thank you," she returned, softly. "And when we take these poor, worn fragments to Him, He will gather them with a tender pity. Pray that He may do this for me, and that I may be content in having missed much brightness that comes to others."

Mr. Leighton prayed. Not mere, meaningless words, but earnest, vital petitions. It seemed to Joe as if he must have known her heart.

One day passed much like another, Joe growing weaker, but with that touching sweetness, different from anything in her former life. She did not shrink from the past, but lingered over it with Hope, remembering some half-forgotten scene or word that

was pleasant to think upon. Hope learned so much of Stephen's early life in this connection. Old days at Tregony, dim wants that began to dawn upon him, fond loves for nature—the saucer of flowers that used to stand on the window-ledge, the books he used to read, and above all, his tenderness for his poor old father. There must have been some heroic element in Joe's nature, stunted perhaps by the coarse blood she had inherited. For having once made her sacrifice, there was no further moan. She even ceased to question.

"I think," she said one day to Hope, "that as we come nearer to death, God takes away all these old longings, and puts himself in their stead. I used to fancy it would be so hard to die without ever having known any real happiness. But nearing the last, we look over life and find so many bright spots! Our days were fuller of gladness than we dreamed. And for all we have missed here, He will give us countless blessings beyond. After He sent you back to me, I had nothing to ask."

Hope kissed her with tearful eyes.

And so she drifted nearer and nearer the unknown sea. September suns waxed and waned, the breath of ripening orchards was wafted to them. Flowers every day—Stephen took care of that. Tenderest care, most devoted love. Restful hours when softest silence brooded over all. Katy singing lower and sadder,

Stephen lingering about, watching with eyes that thrilled her. For she was coming up to his height. When he knew her again as an angel, they would be on the same plane. The poor, jealous, tortured heart was satisfied at last.

One night they counted her pulses, and hung over her in tender agony, not daring to glance at each other. Fainter, fainter. Smiles dying away. Little quiverings all along the flesh, sudden graspings of the hand when some dim fear overtook her, and so the soul of Josephine Dane passed into God's keeping.

Stephen kissed down the eyelids. Did they sleep the sweeter for it? On the resurrection morn they will open with clearer vision, and she shall not be ashamed of this love of hers, that she gladly died for. They who go to the stake are not the only martyrs.

Hope turned blindly away with one low, pitying cry. Stephen took her in his arms, his strong frame trembling with emotion. But something within him was still stronger and more determined, for he spoke not a word.

You know how a house seems when one within lies dead. No other stillness is like unto it. Voices are lowered, as if such a sleep could be disturbed! Meals are sent away untasted. One walks hither and thither, searching familiar rooms — for what? It is hard to believe in death. As if, after a day's sleep, the loved form must rise again and fill its olden place.

Joe, lying cofined in the drawing-room, slept peacefully. The face fair enough now, the shining hair smoothly banded back, touched by no hand save Hope's, who had dropped tears and kisses amid its shining folds. Stephen had watched her labor of love, remembering how once he had been fretted by straggling ends. It would never annoy any one again. A few buds clustered in it, and drooped upon her temple. On her breast tuberoses and jasmine, filling the room with their sorrowful sweetness. How strange that this should be all of her! Thirty-two years ago she had gladdened her mother's heart, and having done all that God appointed for her to do, the end had come.

Can we believe that no life, no atom is wasted; that God, in this world of His, has room for all, and work for all; that these knotty problems we stumble over are mighty truths; that pain, and hunger, and loss, that passionate longings and wasted youth, are held in some infinite order, and made to evolve His purpose that we cannot see, but only grope after in some blind way, when a sudden wrench of agony takes us out of our narrow selves, and shows us that the world is broader than we knew, that this life is but the briefest beginning?

XIII.

HOPE AND STEPHEN.

THEY came back from Laurel Hill — Hope, Stephen, and Katy. The day had been soft and hazy, a gray under-roof of clouds, floating about the heavens, with now and then a faint ray of yellow sunshine. The wind blew inland with a sort of sullen foreboding, bringing with it the sad, threatening wail of an autumn storm. Yet, just at sunset, a cold glow came up in the western sky, a chill and lonesome light.

There was a fire in the sitting-room grate, a tender, rosy warmth diffusing itself. As they went thither after night closed in, both Hope and Stephen thought — if *she* could have it in her narrow home!

Stephen rolled his study chair to its olden corner, and glanced into the slow-burning coals. Not to see visions, or dream dreams. The last battle, he said to himself.

It had seemed an easy enough matter, thinking it over. Yesterday he had brought home from the bank

Hope's little fortune, principal and interest. She was beginning a new and better life than any he could make for her. Young hearts would cluster about her, love in abundance would be offered — not truer than his — he was not morbid in his self-abasement — but more of her kind, bright with youth and hope. She would go away and forget this dark episode. In the glad existence that dawns for seventeen, it would fall off like a shadow. It was all right enough. He had no moan or complaint to make. Even if she could have overlooked that terrible stain, he was too old and grave for her now. It was well she had learned this in the past months. It made him braver to bear all the solitariness of these dreary days to come.

For even if she would have staid here with him, as her guardian, *he* could not stay. Better to fight out the want and gnawing alone, than daily sit at a feast of sweetness he must never taste. He was but a man, and could better deny himself wholly, than linger on this dangerous brink.

He glanced furtively at her. The drooping figure with its pliant grace; the countenance of exquisite beauty, for all its sorrow and tears; the slender hand with the one ring he had given her years ago. Why did she wear it? The small foot with its rosetted slipper, basking there in the crimson fire-light. What foolish dreams he had cherished about them all! Hand and ring, face that was to smile on him, little

foot that was to patter through halls while he sat within hearing distance. How idly sweet! To be buried down deep, as they had that day buried Joe, poor Joe, who had loved him. Ah, her memory would always be fragrant in his heart!

Moment after moment of silence and indecision. Why was he so wretchedly weak!

He rose at length. Hope gave a little start and looked up—one more such glance would have unnerved him. He crossed to the *escritoire*, opened it, and took therefrom a package. He came and laid it on the table beside her.

"I want you to take this," he began huskily. "It is yours. *She* told you that I came in possession of five hundred dollars belonging to your father. Ten years ago that was. I want you to believe that if I could have returned it then in safety, I should have done so. Afterwards I used it, but to me it was always a most sacred trust. To have added to it would have satisfied me better, but I refrain from placing you under the slightest obligation. I desire you to be perfectly free."

There was a constriction in Hope's throat, a dryness in her tongue, that rendered an immediate answer impossible. Stephen passed around to his seat and looked into the fire again. A long, dreary silence followed.

Hope's first sensation was a prideful despair. Stephen did not love her—never had, she said,

with the hasty unbelief of youth. He did not even care to have her stay—he wanted to sever every bond.

O, secret agony of a loving heart! O, blind eyes, that refuse to see; dumb hands, that will not reach out for a gift better than gold. She sat there stunned, pained in every nerve. Not to have his love, when it was all she craved. Poor Joe, lying in your grave, every pang of yours she went over with exceeding pity. Not to be loved again—why, it was slow torture, death!

Some way she came out to calmer thoughts. The blur of agony grew less dense. Why should he love her, when she had so cruelly failed him before? He supposed her vindictive, unrelenting, with no pity for his father's fatal moment of weakness. In a vague, general manner she could moralize on sin and forgiveness; she could tell easily enough what others should do, but the test applied to herself, the case brought home, and she had failed—turned coldly aside. He must despise her!

She went back to that terrible night when she had first believed him guilty of two foul crimes. Ah, how she had wronged him. She ought to have stood up boldly for the man she loved. When Joe said disgrace or a felon's cell could not have dimmed *her* affection, she, so beloved, should have said, "Until I hear from his own lips that he has sinned, I shall think him innocent."

To be so miserably weak in the most important moment of life! To fail when failure was but another name for a perfect wreck of love!

He had given her no opportunity to express her contrition. From the first evening he had found her there, his demeanor had been so calm, so studiously polite, so frank and near in all little daily trifles, so distant in this one important point! He had called her Hope, she had called him Stephen, just as in the old days. A careless observer would not imagine they had ever been separated.

This was the barrier it was so difficult to surmount. He had not failed in any duty, in any proper tenderness. All she could complain of was the deeper, underlying fact that love between them was forever at an end.

Was it really? Did people cast off these most sacred ties with the ease one discarded an old garment, or threw away faded flowers? If Stephen, so strong, so single-hearted in other matters, so faithful in his affections and duties, had loved her last March, he must love her still. If he was willing then to reach out his hand for the cup of happiness God brought to him, would he refuse it now if it came through human intervention?

She sat there thrilled and startled by a wonderful vision. He would never ask again. What if she went and laid her hand in his — said one word?

A hot glow of crimson shot up into her face. Why? Was a woman's pure and honorable love any disgrace to her? Would she be less womanly to confess it? She had promised Joe, if ever the right moment came; and now it was here — the last chance. For when they separated this time, it would be final.

If he still loved her, she said, weakly at first, drawing her breath with a gasp. O, she knew he did. There was not an atom of her whole frame but responded to this consciousness. Was it true that she had only to speak and all would be hers again — plenteousness instead of starvation?

The light seemed to burn dimly, the clock ticked slower, the room was so solemnly still. She put out one foot, she moved her arm, as if to assure herself volition was still hers. It was such a distance from here over to Stephen's chair!

Hope rose, swaying and undecided. Stephen never stirred, but his breath came with a slow terror — something that positively magnetized him. The awful spell of a proud conscience holding the heart in thrall past deliverance, until death. She was going out of the room. At the door she would pause to say "Good night," and leave him forever alone.

Like a blind man groping his way, she went slowly along. I am not sure but her eyes were dim with tears; her very heart seemed to die within her. If she had loved him a little less, she must have failed.

She came around behind his chair ; she laid her hand upon his shoulder. The trembling lips made two or three ineffectual efforts, and then murmured, "Stephen !"

The very breath seemed to strangle him. Because he wanted to clasp her to his heart, and fill the face with hungry kisses, even with the unavailing transport of despair ; he roused every nerve into a state of desperate control, and said, in a voice so deathly calm that it sounded cold to her, —

"Well?"

How her hand trembled ! He felt it through his coat. Darling little fingers, soft and white — for some other man's fond caresses. For if he so much as cast his eyes around to them, the passion of his manhood must find a voice.

"Stephen, you think we are quite free of all obligations to one another?"

It was not what she had intended to say, not the little speech she had been studying over yonder in her chair.

"Yes. Don't let any thought of this ever burden you in the days to come. That night when I found you, so long ago, I meant to make your life blessed and happy. In all the places where I have failed, forgive me. God knows how true and earnest my heart was."

Not a movement on his part. The eyes still studying the fire, the hands lying listless in his lap.

"Stephen, you can make me happier !"

He reached out curiously for something, with a dim sensation that he should never find it. Close to his heart, with a low cry, it came — a golden head, a sweet, pleading young face, its blushes hidden.

"No, you don't mean it, Hope! Think a little. My poor, stained life —"

His voice was broken and tremulous. His strong frame quivered with intense emotion.

"I mean that I love you. Ever since that day in March. But I was so weak! O, Stephen, if you will forgive those miserable doubts!"

The words came between passionate sobs.

"Hope," — his voice was very tender, though he dared not put in it the love surging through him like a mighty sea, — "we will not rush madly into another bond. I want you to look closely into this matter. It is life and death to me now. I am not clearly sure that I have any right to your love."

"Not when I give it to you?"

Such a sad, pathetic cry! No wonder he drew her nearer to the heart, beating for her alone.

"You know *all* — she told you?" His voice was husky, and great drops of anguish stood out on his forehead.

"I know all. How you suffered for another; how you carried about his burden — was patient to the last moment, and how you strove to repair his sin. But the dumb and fearful misery of those days and nights I can

only fancy ; never realize to the full extent what they were to you. In all you were guiltless. But the bitterest pang of all was to have the friends you loved distrust you."

"Yes, it was."

She never knew half his pain and agony until then. She felt so utterly abased that she would have slidden down on her knees beside him, if he had not held her so tightly.

"Stephen," she said, brokenly, "if my love can make any amends, take it, use it ; not as a holiday thing, to be petted and pampered, but a very servant. Let it bear your burdens ; let it watch early and late ; let it toil and minister to you ; and even then it cannot atone for the cruel past. It goes down to the very dust at your feet, humbled, repentant as it is for having failed you in that dread hour. Forgive its weakness, its blindness.

He found the wet face, and kissed it. He laid his cheek against the golden hair. His for all time, right or wrong.

"I was a coward then," he began, fiercely. "If I had told you the whole story ! I was afraid to shock you. I never could seem to determine in my own mind how far God had put a curse of blood between us, how far that awful stain was to shadow both lives. I thought to keep it out of yours. It seems right that such deadly sins should bring some punishment."

"Stephen," she said, softly, "remember, *he* did not mean to do it. It was not a moment of violent passion, even. Joe told me how weak and wandering he was. One can forgive an accident better than a premeditated sin."

"Yes. And I believe he repented to the utmost possibility of his poor nature. But he was a thief, and *my* father, Hope. And before that, I had hated Mr. Vennard, grudged him his power, his wealth. I am not sure but I envied him you. How much of that evil and corrupt blood runs in my veins?" and he gave a shiver of disgust.

"None, Stephen," — in a clear, sweet tone. "God washed it out. Do you suppose those years of tender care, such as you gave your father, count for nothing in His eyes? Do you suppose that to have saved one little child from want and misery counts for nothing in His sight who watches the very sparrows? Shall a man be more unrelenting than God?"

"I want you to know me as I am. Much older than you; worn with cares; a man of strong passions, who has been tried and tempted as but few are; who has not always been true to the manhood God stamped upon him; who has failed miserably, and struggled again; who has been cowardly when he should have faced the truth; who has weakly shrunk back and cried out with fear when God placed some fresh duty in his way —"

"And I take him just as he is, Stephen. Not from

pity, or any sense of romantic justice, but because I love him. I need him. For the two who have gone to God we can trust him to solve all intricate questions of where accountability rests. We have nothing to do with that dark path. Our way shall be in the light."

"God bless you," he said, humbly. "My Hope!"

"Yours;" and climbing up in her childish fashion, she twined her arms around his neck and kissed him.

They both thought of that night in the Foundry. It seemed as if love must have sent out its tender roots then, and, through shine and shower, arrived at last at blossoming.

Afterwards they looked this great joy in the face, and found that it did not blind them. They dared to think of the future; of their two lives, so strangely blending into one; of Stephen, no longer burdened with a fearful secret; of the old stain washed out; all the misunderstandings cleared up, handed over in God's keeping.

"Poor Joe!" Hope said, softly. "We can never blame her for that terrible mistake, since it has brought us to a truer happiness. Every human soul has its work in this world."

"It is my punishment that she loved me so well. I want you to know, Hope, that I would have married her at the last."

"She told me. I think you were right, Stephen. I

wish it could have been. But through those later days she was so changed !”

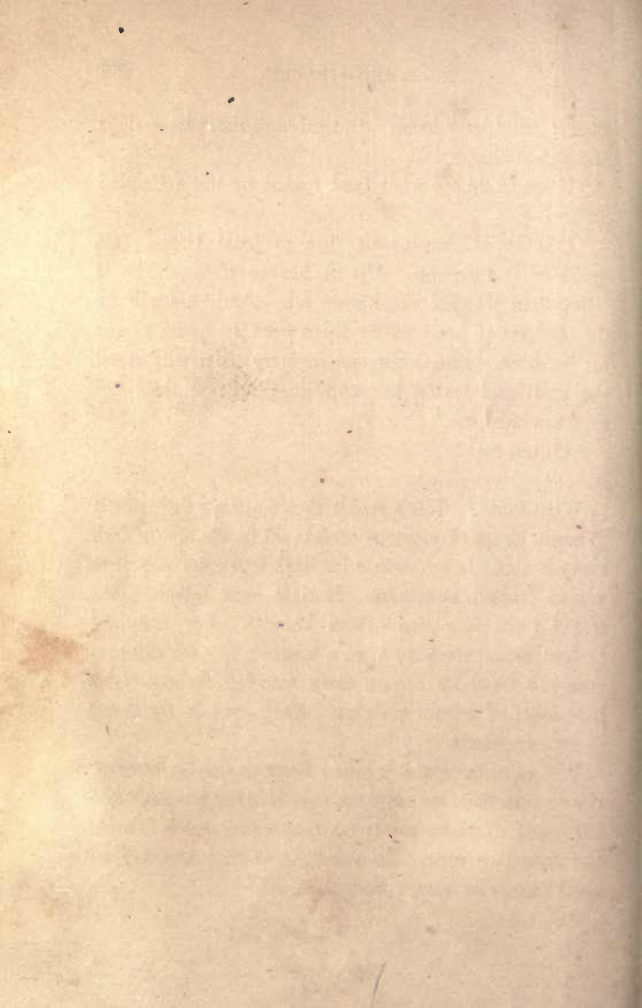
“If we could see what God meant by these tangled paths !”

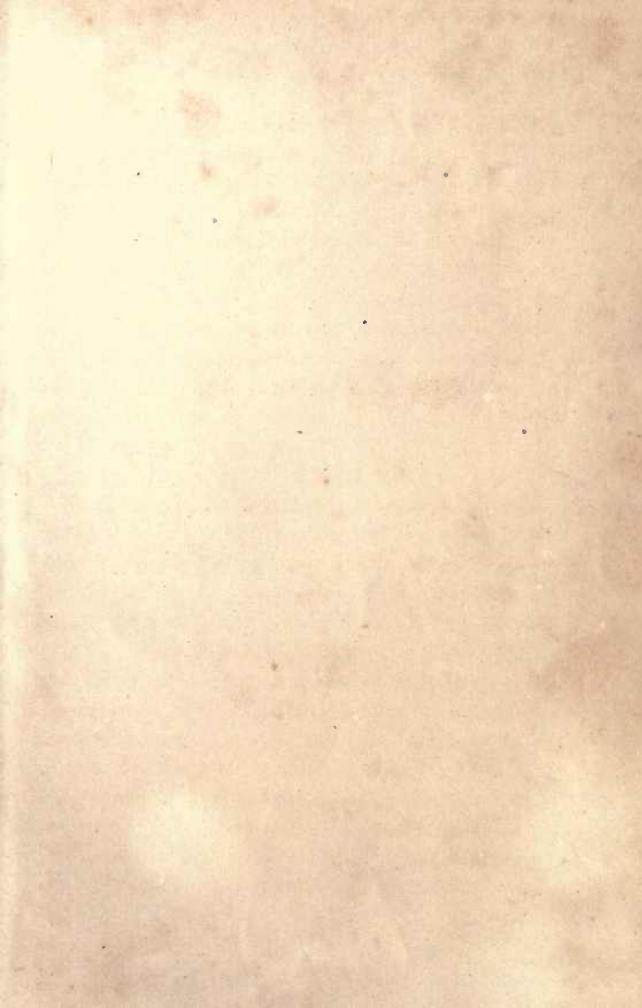
“I think He means us just to trust Him. His guidance is unerring. Up in heaven to-night she is wiser than we, for she knows all. And God will be the tenderer to her because there were so many thorns for her here. She is our one memory, Stephen, of all the past, and laying her away in the grave does not shut out her love.”

“O, no, no !”

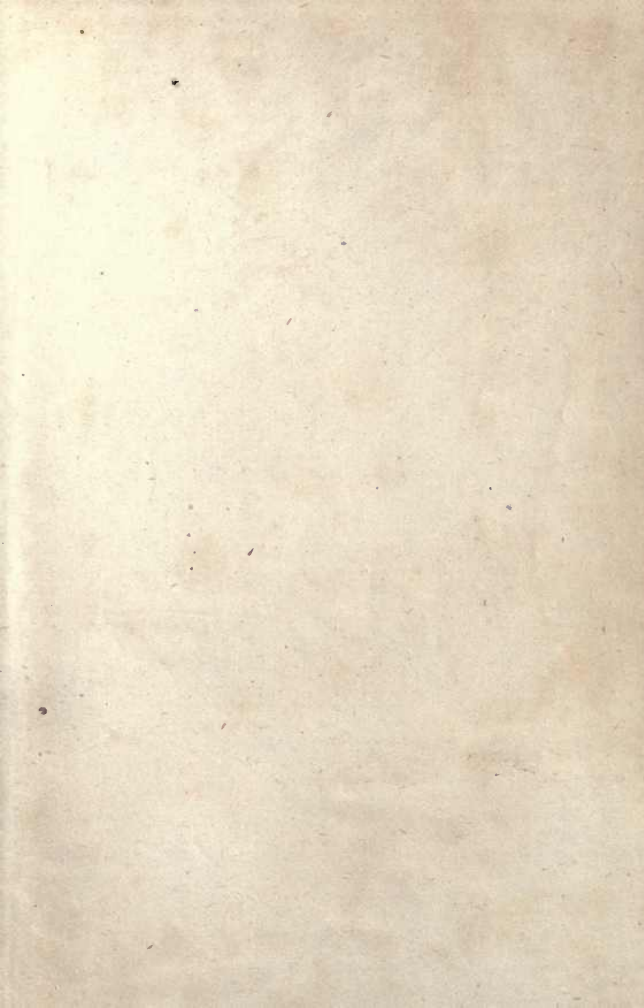
What more? Life's problems are always unfinished. When a strain of music is broken off in the middle, we carry it about in our hearts for days together, and marvel at fancied sweetness. Had it been finished, we might have forgotten—who knows? For the bud broken on the stalk we have a tender pity; for the rose that has lived its day, a more satisfied feeling. All here must be partial with us. Each soul is restricted to its own wants.

But when the stone is rolled away on the morning of the resurrection, we shall see that Heaven has kept and harvested all these mysteries that would have blinded our wavering eyes. In the light of that new day we shall “know as we are known.”









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